Al-Mīzān

An Exegesis of the Qur'an

ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

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In the Name of Allah,
the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds;
the Beneficent, the Merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgment;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech
for help;
Guide us in the straight path;
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed
favors,not of those against whom Thou art
wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

O Allah! send Your blessings to the head of
Your messengers and the last of
Your prophets,
Muḥammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send Your blessings to all Your
prophets and envoys.

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Arabic Transliteration Key

Arabic Letters	Transliteration	Arabic Letters	Transliteration
ا	ā	ع	ʿ
ب	b	غ	gh
ت	t	ف	f
ث	th	ق	q
ج	j	ك	k
ح	ḥ	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ذ	dh	ه	h
ر	r	و	w/ū
ز	z	ى	y/ī
س	s	ء	ʾ
ش	sh	ة	-
ص	ṣ	ـَ	a
ض	ḍ	ـَ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُ	u
ظ	ẓ		

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Publishers Note

In an effort to make the text more accessible to English-speaking readers, the editors have chosen to use English names for the prophets and figures (as listed below but not limited to) and to use Anglicized terms that now appear in English dictionaries.

Ādam	Adam	Mūsā	Moses
Dāwūd	David	Sulaymān	Solomon
Hārūn	Aaron	Shuʿayb	Jethro
Ibrāhīm	Abraham	Yaʿqūb	Jacob
ʿĪsā	Jesus	ʾAyyūb	Job
Isḥāq	Isaac	Yūshaʿ	Joshua
Ismāʿīl	Ishmael	Yūsuf	Joseph
Jibrāʾīl	Gabriel	Zakariyyā	Zachariah
Maryam	Mary	ʿUzayr	Ezra

Arabic terms and names have been transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).

For ease of reading, glyphs and traditional honorifics such as "peace be upon him" or (s.a.w.) which are commonly used as a gesture of respect after the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imāms, or other sacred figures have been omitted from this text. No disrespect is intended, and may God's peace and blessings be upon them all!

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Foreword

This volume features ʿAllāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī's (1904–81) exegesis of Sūrah al-Zumar (39), Sūrah al-Ghāfir (also known as al-Muʾmin, (40), and Sūrah al-Fuṣṣilat (also known as Ḥā Mīm Sajda, 41). The introductions to other volumes will, no doubt, have already provided the contours of the author's scholarly career and discussed his overall methodology in his *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*. Therefore, this introduction will focus on providing an overview of the contents of this volume and highlighting their overarching themes.

These three chapters of the Qur'an were revealed during the Meccan phase of the Prophet Muḥammad's mission. As a result, we should not be surprised to find they share contextual and thematic connections with one another; all three focus on the Prophet's call to monotheism and his people's response to and rejection of this and warn their audience about the inevitability of the Day of Resurrection.

These moral admonitions are accompanied by appeals for the idolaters to look up and contemplate upon the world around them and the heavens above them, along with arguments and rhetorical turns intended to expose the internal contradictions of idolatry and demonstrate the internal consistency of monotheism as a system of belief. However, they also differ in important ways, and each has its own particular themes and concerns:

The first of these three chapters, Sūrah al-Zumar ('the Throngs'), takes its name from the description of the Final Judgement in its closing verse: *The faithless will be driven to hell in throngs* [zumaran]… (39:71) *Those who are wary of their Lord will be driven to paradise in throngs* [zumaran]… (39:73). In fact, the closing passages of this chapter present one of the most vivid and detailed portrayals of the Final Judgement found anywhere in the Qur'an (39:67–75). It begins with the rebuke that *the idolaters do not regard Allah with the regard due to Him* but then explains the folly of this by describing the events of the Day of Resurrection, as if to say: 'If the idolaters knew what would happen on the Day of Resurrection, they would regard God with the regard He is due.' Time and again, this chapter exhorts its audience to dedicate their faith exclusively to God and presents rational arguments for God's oneness in lordship (*rubūbiyya*) and

divinity (*ulūhiyya*)—in other words, that God alone (and not the lesser gods of the Quraysh) governs the cosmos and, therefore, that God alone is worthy of invocation and worship. In the logic of this chapter, it is the idolaters' failure to recognise this and their dedication to false deities that will ultimately consign them to suffering in the afterlife.

Sūrah 40 takes the name al-Ghāfir ('the Forgiver') from the description of the God of revelation offered in its opening verses: *…the All-mighty, the All-knowing, forgiver of sins* [ghāfir al-dhanb] *and acceptor of repentance, severe in retribution, all-bountiful, there is no god except Him…* (40:2–3). It is also known as al-Muʾmin ('the Believer') because it features the story of the believer 'from Pharaoh's clan, who concealed his faith' (40:28). This believer speaks up for Moses and warns the Egyptians against killing him without first considering his claims, lest they invite God's punishment upon themselves in this life or the next. Recalling that this story would have first been revealed in Mecca, its central message must have resonated with those who recognized the truth of what the Prophet was saying but who were afraid to publicly proclaim their support for him out of fear of persecution by the Quraysh. The believer from Pharaoh's clan also repeatedly addresses his audience as *yā qawmī* (O my people!) before delivering moral admonitions to them (40:38–44). Given that the Qur'an was recited aloud to an audience, it may have seemed to those listening that this the believer from Pharaoh's clan was almost speaking directly to the men and women of Mecca and to their circumstances. This chapter of the Qur'an also makes a point of contrasting the fate of the believer from Pharaoh's clan—who was delivered from the evil of his own people—to that of those who followed Pharaoh and suffered punishment in this life and the next with him (40:45–6).

Sūrah 41 is known by the name of Fuṣṣilat from the description of the Qur'anic revelation found in its opening verses, namely *a Book whose signs have been elaborated* [fuṣṣilat āyātuhu]. It is also known as Ḥā Mīm Sajda because it opens with the disconnected letters *Ḥā Mīm* and a verse of prostration (*āyat al-sajda*) occurs within it. The central concern of the chapter is people's rejection of the Qur'anic revelation and, by extension, the three core principles of the Islamic faith: Monotheism, prophethood, and resurrection. As its name suggests, a particular focus of the chapter is that the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic so that the Prophet's people could understand it (41:3), as *Had We made it a foreign Qur'an, they would have surely said, Why have not its signs been elaborated?'* [law lā fuṣṣilat āyātuhu]

(41:44—note the recurrence of the verb *fuṣṣilat* in this complaint!) Clearly, the idolaters expressed misgivings about the revelation because it was in their own language (Arabic) rather than the languages of other scriptures with which they would have been familiar (Hebrew and Syriac, for example). However, as the Qur'an points out, if it had been revealed in any other language or to any other people, they would have complained they could not understand it and disbelieved all the same: *Had We sent it down upon some non-Arab and had he recited it to them, they would not have believed in it* (26:199). This, in fact, takes us to one of the key points that the Qur'an returns to time and again throughout its verses: That this is a revelation that is intended to be understood.

This point is exemplified by the fact that these chapters were revealed in the context of ongoing debates with the idolaters of Mecca. Therefore, in many of these verses, God is responding quite directly to human arguments and concerns. Quite often, we only hear the echo of the arguments employed the Prophet's polytheistic opponents, with much of what they say being left implicit. One of the strengths of

Ṭabāṭabāʾī's exegesis—and perhaps a reflection of his expertise in philosophy—is that he is able to present and analyze these arguments in a way that helps contemporary readers understand the mindset of the Prophet's opponents and, in doing so, better grasp the significance of the Qur'an's arguments in their original context (for example, see his extended discussion on idolatry in his exegesis of 39:1).

In closing, I would like to express my appreciation to the Tawheed Institute of Australia, and not least to the indefatigable Ali Khalfan, for making this latter-day classic of Qur'anic exegesis by one of the giants of Islamic intellectual history from the last century available to English readers in its entirety for the first time.

Alexander Khaleeli, translator
London, UK
August, 2022

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Chapter 39

Sūrah al-Zumar

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Verses 1 to 10

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

From the verses of this chapter, it appears that the polytheists from the Prophet's people demanded that he give up his monotheistic stance, stop summoning people to believe in divine unity, and turn instead towards their deities, with whom they threatened him. This chapter was revealed in response to these circumstances, and it is in some ways a companion chapter to Sūrah Ṣād (Chapter 38). In it, God emphasizes His instructions to the Prophet to dedicate his faith exclusively to Him, pay no attention to the false gods of the idol worshippers, and tell them that he has been commanded to be a monotheist and dedicate his faith to God alone—a stance that has been supported by a succession of signs both in the form of revelation and in the form of rational argumentation.

Time and again throughout the chapter, God calls on His audience to dedicate their faith to Him. For example, in the opening verses, He says: *…so worship Allah, putting exclusive faith in Him. Look! Only exclusive faith is for Allah…* (39:2–3). Then, He returns to the topic again and says: *Say, 'Indeed I have been commanded to worship Allah with exclusive faith in Him…'* (39:11), until the verse: *Say, 'Only Allah do I worship, putting my exclusive faith in Him'* (39:14).

Then He says: *You will surely die, and they will surely die too* (39:30), followed by: *Does not Allah suffice His servant? They would frighten you of others than Him…* (39:36), followed by: *Say, 'O my people! Act according to your ability. I too am acting…'* (39:39), followed by: *Say, 'Will you, then, bid me to worship other than Allah, O you who have no sense?'* (39:64). And there are other reminders besides the ones mentioned here.

God presents arguments in this chapter that demonstrate His unity in lordship and divinity, both by way of revelation and rational argumentation. He draws subtle comparisons between the believers and the

disbelievers, time and again describing the believers with the most beautiful qualities and giving them glad tidings of the rewards that await them in the Hereafter. At the same time, He admonishes the idolaters and warns them of the loss and punishment they will suffer in the Hereafter as well as the afflictions that will befall them in this world, telling them that they will share the same fate as those past nations who denied God's messengers—a humiliating punishment in this world and an even greater punishment in the next.

After this, the chapter turns to describing the Day of Resurrection, especially its outcomes, in the clearest and most complete detail.

Based on the tone and context of its verses, this chapter was revealed in Mecca, and it appears to have been revealed all at once because of the close relationship that exists between its verses.

The first ten verses we will examine comprise the summons to monotheism by way of revelation and rational arguments, which begin by addressing the Prophet directly.

تَنْزِيلُ الْكِتَابِ مِنَ اللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَكِيمِ ﴿١﴾

(39:1) ***The gradually sent-down Book from Allah, the All-mighty, the All-wise***

In terms of its syntax, this verse is the predicate of an implicit subject (namely, This is *the gradually sent-down book*). *Tanzīl* (gradually sent down) is a verbal noun, and it is used here with the meaning of a passive participle. It forms an *iḍāfa* (possessive construct) with the noun *kitāb* (Book) to signify an adjectival relationship with it. At the same time the prepositional phrase *min Allāh* (from God…) qualifies *gradually sent-down*. Therefore, the full meaning of the verse is: 'This is the Book gradually sent-down from Allah, the All-mighty, the All-wise.'

Some have said that *Tanzīl al-kitāb* is the subject, and *min Allāh* is the predicate (which would render the meaning: 'The gradual sending-down of the Book is from Allah…'). However, the first reading seems more plausible.

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ فَاعْبُدِ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ الدِّينَ ﴿٢﴾

(39:2) ***Indeed We have sent down the Book to you with the truth; so worship Allah, putting exclusive faith in Him.***

Here, God uses the verb *inzāl* instead of *tanzīl* to express the meaning

'sending down,' even though the latter was used in the previous verse. This is because He wishes to explain that the revelation is true, and this applies to the entirety of what has come down to the Prophet from his Lord (and *tanzīl* signifies its sending down in parts, whereas *inzāl* signifies its sending down as a whole).

In the phrase *bi al-ḥaqq* (…with the truth), the preposition *bi* (with) conveys the meaning of accompaniment. In other words, it means: 'We sent it down to You accompanied with the truth.' Therefore, the command it contains to worship God alone is the truth. Accordingly, God draws the following conclusion from this point: *so worship Allah, putting exclusive faith in Him,* meaning: 'Because this has been revealed with the truth, you should worship Allah putting exclusive faith in Him, as this is a commandment contained within it.'

The meaning of *dīn* (faith) in this verse, based on its context and tone, is *ʿibāda* (worship). It could also mean one's way of life, which refers to the way in which one conducts oneself in this world and in human society. Worship, on the other hand, refers to practicing one's servanthood (*ʿubūdiyya*) by following the method prescribed by God. This means that the servant should display their servanthood to God in all aspects of their lives by following His prescriptions and ordinances therein, as when someone dedicates their faith to Him alone, they do not stray from what He has legislated.

أَلَا لِلَّهِ الدِّينُ الْخَالِصُ ۚ وَالَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ مَا نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبُونَا إِلَى اللَّهِ زُلْفَىٰ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَهُمْ فِي مَا هُمْ فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي مَنْ هُوَ كَاذِبٌ كَفَّارٌ ﴿٣﴾

(39:3) ***Look! Only exclusive faith is for Allah, and those who take guardians besides Him [claiming,] 'We only worship them so that they may bring us near to Allah,' Allah will indeed judge between them concerning that about which they differ. Indeed Allah does not guide someone who is a liar and an ingrate.***

This proclaims and announces what was implied by *with the truth* and generalizes the specific command to *worship Allah, putting exclusive faith in Him* in the previous verse. In other words, God says: *What We have revealed to you about dedicating your faith exclusively to Allah is obligatory for everyone who hears this call.* And it is because this sentence is a proclamation in its own right that the verses use God's proper name even

though it might appear more appropriate to use a pronoun, such as *Only exclusive faith is for Allah…*

The phrase *Only exclusive faith is for Allah* means that He will not accept the worship of anyone who does not worship Him and Him alone, whether they worship Him at the same time as worshipping others or whether they worship others to the exclusion of Him.

As for the passage, *…and those who take guardians besides Him [claiming,] 'We only worship them so that they may bring us near to Allah…,'* and the rest of the verse, we have already discussed how the idolaters at the Prophet's time believed that God was too exalted to be comprehended by the human mind, whether by reason, estimation, or sense, and in doing so they believed that He was too exalted to even be worshipped by human beings.

Therefore, they argued, it was necessary to seek nearness to Him via His intermediaries in creation, and they are the ones who were given authority over the affairs of this world. Therefore, the polytheists took them as lords (*arbāb*) besides God, then as deities to be worshipped in order to draw near to them so that they might intercede on their behalf with God and bring them closer to Him. These intermediaries were angels, jinns, and holy persons who the idolaters considered to be genuine divinities in their own right.

As for the idols that were shaped into various forms from wood, stone, and other materials and erected in temples, they are merely representations of these lords and deities—they are not lords or deities in their own right. However, the ignorant masses were unable to draw this distinction between the physical idols and the spiritual deities they were supposed to represent. As a result, they came to worship the idols as if they were the very same lords and deities to whom they clung. This was the religion of the pre-Islamic Arabs and the uneducated laypersons of the Sabaean faith, who also forgot the distinction between the idols of the stars they worshipped and the stars themselves, and between the stars—which were, in turn, celestial idols for the spirits that governed them—and the spirits that were the true lords and gods worshipped by the Sabaean priesthood.

In any case, they worshipped these lords and deities, even while they were contingent beings who had been created by God, because they believed they had the power to intercede on their behalf with God, bring them nearer to Him, and that He had endowed them with responsibility for the affairs of the material realm, each according to its specific station. As for God Himself, according to them, His only function was creation

and origination. He was the Lord of Lords and the God of Gods.

Having recapitulated this, it is now clear what the Qur'an means by the phrase *…and those who take guardians besides Him…*—it refers to them believing in lords who governed the affairs of the universe, attributing lordship and rulership of the cosmos to them rather than to God. These idolaters believed it was these lords, not God, who governed the affairs of everything in this world. Therefore, it made sense to them that they should worship these deities and serve them, because to worship and serve them was to gain benefit, repel harm, or give thanks for their blessings. All of this stemmed from the fact that they believed these deities controlled the affairs of the world rather than God.

Therefore, when the Qur'an says they took *awliyāʾ* (guardians) besides Him, this means they took *arbāb* (lords) besides him, because guardianship and lordship are similar in meaning, for the lord is the sovereign ruler, while the guardian is the one who governs and rules. This is why, after mentioning their taking up these deities as guardians besides God, the verse mentions worship: *We only worship them so that they may bring us near to Allah…*

Hence, *and those who take guardians besides Him* is the subject of the sentence and *Allah will indeed judge between them…* is its predicate. Therefore, the word *them* here refers to the idolaters who assert the lordship and divinity of these associates, save for the fact that some of the ignorant have asserted that He is a partner to them in worship.

The statement, *We only worship them so that they may bring us near to Allah…*, is an exposition of *take guardians besides Him,* and it is supposed to be quoting their justification for this or paraphrasing it. In other words, when questioned, they say: *We only worship these deities that they might bring us near to Allah through our worship of them.* And, in doing this, they are turning aside from God and toward beings other than Him. Indeed, they are only given the Arabic name *mushrikūn* (literally, *associators*) because they associate others with Him by saying that they are lords and deities for this world and that God is Lord and Deity for them. As for these deities participating in either the creation or origination of the cosmos, this is not something either the idolaters or the monotheists have ever claimed.

Regarding the phrase, *Allah will indeed judge between them concerning that about which they differ,* some have said that the plural pronoun *hum* (them) refers to the idolaters and their guardians. In other words, God will judge between the idolaters and their guardians concerning those things

about which they differed. Others have said these plural pronouns refer to the idolaters and their monotheistic opponents who dedicated their faith exclusively to God, based on the context of the verse. In other words, God will judge between the idolaters and between those who dedicated their faith to Him.

Allah does not guide someone who is a liar and an ingrate: A *kaffār* (ingrate) is either someone who displays extreme ingratitude (*kufrān*) for God's blessings or someone who goes to extremes in covering the truth (*kufr*). This sentence indicates that God's Judgment on the Day of Resurrection will go against the disbelievers and not in their favour, and that they will be heading to hell. The meaning of guidance here is to convey someone to a good outcome.

لَوْ أَرَادَ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَتَّخِذَ وَلَدًا لَاصْطَفَىٰ مِمَّا يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ ۚ سُبْحَانَهُ ۖ هُوَ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ ﴿٤﴾

(39:4) ***Had Allah intended to take a son, He could have chosen from those He has created whatever He wished. Immaculate is He! He is Allah, the One, the All-paramount.***

Here, God presents an argument against their claim: *Allah has taken a son,* or the claim of some others: *The angels are Allah's daughters.* The idea that God had a son was a common belief amongst the various sects of idolaters, and the Christians had proclaimed that Jesus was the Son of God, while the Qur'an reports that the Jews had claimed that the Prophet Ezra was the son of God, although it appears that they meant this merely as an honorific status rather than a metaphysical one.

In whatever form it takes, believing that God has a son is tantamount to associating partners with God, because of the relationship that exists between a son and a father or a parent and a child. If what is meant by *son of Allah* is a genuine son, this entails deriving one thing from another and separating it from it, which would consequently entail the son sharing in the essence of the father and all of the qualities and effects that flow from that. This is in the same way that when one human is the child of another, this entails the child sharing the humanity of the parent and all that this entails. On the other hand, if what is meant by *son of Allah* is a figurative son, such as a son taken through adoption, then this entails the son sharing in the status of the father, which includes his authority, dominion, nobility, rank, and some of the rules pertaining to lineage. The

argument presented in this verse demonstrates the impossibility of either meaning of God taking a son.

The phrase *Had Allah intended to take a son…* is a conditional clause prefixed by the particle *law* (which is used in Arabic to signify something impossible) to show that this is an impossibility. Then, the phrase *He could have chosen from those He has created whatever He wished* means that He would have chosen from His creation whatever He willed for that, based on the context of the verse, and *from those He created* indicates that this is something other than Him because whatever is other than Him must have been created by Him.

Immaculate is He! declares Him transcendent above this, and *He is Allah, the One, the All-paramount* explains why the aforementioned hypothetical situation is impossible, namely that it is impossible that He ever intended to take a son, and therefore the consequent of that conditional clause (He could have chosen from those He has created…) is also impossible. This is because He is absolutely one in His essence and utterly transcendent, such that nothing shares any aspect of His essence and nothing is akin to Him in essence, as demonstrated by the proofs of divine unity. He is also absolutely one in His essential attributes—such as life, knowledge, and power—which are nothing other than His essence. And He is absolutely one in the affairs that flow from this essence, such as creation, sovereignty, might, and greatness. In other words, nothing else has a share in any of these with Him.

He is *All-paramount* because He is dominant over all things by virtue of His essence and attributes. Nothing that exists is independent in its essence or its existence from His essence and existence, nor can anything do without Him in its attributes or its effects. Therefore, everything that exists is humbled and low in relation to Him. Everything that exists is within His dominion. Everything that exists is in need of Him.

In short, the argument presented in this verse is a straightforward conditional syllogism which affirms the contradictory of the antecedent and, therefore, yields the contradictory of the consequent (if x then y, not-x, therefore not-y). It is as if to say:

(1) *If Allah wanted to take a son, He would have chosen whoever He wanted from His creation for that purpose* (if x then y);

(2) *But it is impossible for Allah to want to take a son because He is the One, the All-paramount* (not-x);

(3) *Therefore, it is impossible that He should have chosen anyone from His creation for that purpose* (therefore not-y).

Some commentators have adopted a strange reading of the verse in order to derive an argument from it. They argue:

> 'It means: If God wanted to take a son, it would be impossible for Him to want this, because such a thing is impossible, and it is not possible for the Creator to will the impossible, as this would entail an arbitrary preponderance of some contingent beings over others.
>
> 'This is because the principle behind the verse is: "If Allah took a son, this would be impossible because it would entail a contradiction of His divinity." However, instead of saying this, it instead reduces that idea to, "Had Allah intended to take a son, this would be impossible…" because this phrasing is more eloquent and expressive. Then, the consequent ("this would be impossible") is also omitted for reasons of eloquence and replaced with "… He could have chosen…" to call attention to the fact that this is possible, whereas the first ("this would have been impossible for Him to will") is not. It also shows that if "choosing" one of His creatures is what is meant by "taking a son," then this sense of "taking a son" is possible for God. Therefore, by adopting this form of expression and without introducing any complications, the association between the two parts of the conditional proposition is correct, as is the negation of the consequent and the affirmation of the antecedent.'

It appears that this argument is taken from al-Zamakhsharī writing about this verse in his *al-Kashshāf*, where he says:

> 'It means that if God had wanted to take a son, this cannot happen and He could not will such a thing precisely because it is impossible. It could only occur if He were to choose some of His creatures, single them out, and bring them close to Him in the same manner that a man singles out His son and keeps him closer than others. God did this with the angels, which is what caused the polytheists to fall into error, believing that because God had given them a special station that they must be His offspring, because they were ignorant about the essence of God, which is contrary to the essences of bodies and the qualities that inhere in them.
>
> It is as if God means to say: 'If He wished to take a son, this would not go beyond what He did by choosing whatever He willed of His creation already—namely, the angels. However, you in your ignorance about Him believed that by choosing them He had

made them His offspring, and then you went to extremes in your ignorance and called the angels daughters of God. In doing so, you became ingrate deniers, who invented lies about God and His angels of outrageous proportions and went to extremes in your disbelief.'

However, as you can see, the tone and context of the verse do not support this explanation. Nor does al-Zamakhsharī's argument do anything to refute the claim of those who say that God adopted a son from His creatures and that being a 'son of God' is an honorific title (rather than a metaphysical state), such as when the Jews said that Ezra was the son of God. For when they make this claim, they simply mean that God chose whoever He willed from amongst His creatures for this honour.

There are still other readings of the argument present in this verse, which we will not mention here because of their lack of merit.

خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ ۖ يُكَوِّرُ اللَّيْلَ عَلَى النَّهَارِ وَيُكَوِّرُ النَّهَارَ عَلَى اللَّيْلِ ۖ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ ۖ كُلٌّ يَجْرِي لِأَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى ۗ أَلَا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْغَفَّارُ ﴿٥﴾

(39:5) ***He created the heavens and the earth with truth. He winds the night over the day, and winds the day over the night, and He has disposed the sun and the moon, each moving for a specified term. Look! He is the All-mighty, the All-forgiver!***

It is likely that this reference to the grandeur of God's creation and governance thereof is an exposition of His All-paramount-ness. However, the close connection between this verse and the following one and the fact that the latter ends with *That is Allah, your Lord!* suggests that this is a new passage, whose purpose is to lay out the argument for God's oneness in divine lordship.

Therefore, both the present verse and the one following it were revealed within the context of expounding God's oneness in lordship. Between them, they combine both the creation of the world and its governance, and this is because—as we have already mentioned previously—the idolaters did not believe that there was any contradiction between asserting the oneness of the creator and believing in a multitude of lords and deities, because they did not deny that God alone was the creator and the originator of all things. Therefore, when God presents His argument for His singularity in lordship and divinity, He combines creation with

the governance of the cosmos to show that governance (*tadbīr*) is not extraneous to creation (*khalq*) but rather is an aspect of creation, just as creation is an aspect of governance. With that, He concludes the argument for the fact that governance belongs solely to Him just as creation belongs solely to Him.

Therefore, the statement, *He created the heavens and the earth with truth,* introduces the question of creation. The phrase *bi al-ḥaqq* (with truth)—where the preposition *bi*, as before, is indicative of accompaniment—is a reference to the Resurrection; the creation is true and with reason (*ḥaqq*) rather than false and in vain (*bāṭil*) because it has a purpose for which it was made and a destination towards which it is heading, namely the Resurrection. Elsewhere, God says: *We did not create the sky and the earth and whatever is between them in vain* (38:27).

He winds the night over the day, and winds the day over the night: In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī says that *takwīr* (to wind) means to put a part of something on top of another part of it. Therefore, to wind the night over the day and to wind the day over the night is a metaphor, similar to *He draws the night's cover over the day* (7:54), which refers to the continuous succession of day after night and night after day, which takes place by His making them follow one after another. This is an example of divine governance.

…and He has disposed the sun and the moon, each moving for a specified term: Meaning that He has made the sun and the moon subject to the cosmic order and set them in motion until a specified time, which they will not overstep.

Look! He is the All-mighty, the All-forgiver! It is possible that God chooses to invoke these two names to allude to what demonstrates His singularity in lordship and divinity in these signs, for the All-mighty is the one who is never cowed, and if God is All-mighty then He alone is worthy of worship, whereas others who are sometimes humbled and find themselves in need are not. The same is true for the one who forgives sins; when compared to others who do not have the ability to do this, He alone is worthy of worship.

It is also possible that God invokes these two names at the end of the verse to encourage the audience to believe in His oneness and have faith in Him, in which case the meaning would be: "He is the All-mighty, so believe in Him and become mighty through His might; He is the All-forgiving, so believe in Him, and He will forgive you."

خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَأَنْزَلَ لَكُمْ مِنَ
الْأَنْعَامِ ثَمَانِيَةَ أَزْوَاجٍ ۚ يَخْلُقُكُمْ فِي بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ خَلْقًا مِنْ بَعْدِ
خَلْقٍ فِي ظُلُمَاتٍ ثَلَاثٍ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ ۖ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ
فَأَنَّىٰ تُصْرَفُونَ ﴿٦﴾

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(39:6) ***He created you from a single soul, then made from it its mate, and He has sent down for you eight mates of the cattle. He creates you in the wombs of your mothers, creation after creation, in a threefold darkness. That is Allah, your Lord! To Him belongs all sovereignty. There is no god except Him. Then where are you being led away?***

Here, God is speaking to all mankind. *A single soul*—based on what similar verses say—is a reference to Adam, the first human, and *its mate* refers to his wife who was from the same species as him and alike him in her humanity. Based on the structure of the verse, *then* (*thumma*) signifies a passage of time between the two events.

Therefore, the meaning is that God created the human species and made it abundant from a single soul and its mate.

…and He has sent down for you eight mates of the cattle—anʿām (cattle) refers to camels, cows, sheep, and goats. This verse says there are *eight mates* (thamāniya azwājin) because each species has both a male and a female.

God says describes the creation of the cattle upon the earth as *inzāl* (sending down) because He uses the verb *inzāl* to denote coming into being of things that did not previously exist, as they came down from His treasure houses that are with Him and from the realm of the unseen to the realm of the visible, as per the verse: *There is not a thing but that its sources are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure* (15:21).

He creates you in the wombs of your mothers, creation after creation, in a threefold darkness: Here, God expounds how He creates the humans and animals aforementioned. By using the direct address (you), the focus is placed primarily on those beings endowed with intellects. *Creation after creation* (khalq min baʿd al-khalq) refers to the successive and consecutive stages of creation, such as creating a zygote from the egg and semen, then the embryonic mass from the zygote, and so on. The *threefold darkness* (**ẓulumāt thalāth**) refers to the darkness of the stomach, the womb, and

the amniotic sac—at least, according to what some have said and what has been narrated from Imam al-Bāqir in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

Others have said that this *threefold darkness* refers to the darkness of the loins, the womb, and the embryonic sac. However, this is not correct, because the verse makes clear with the phrase *in the wombs of your mothers* that this darkness is within the women's bellies, not in the loins of men.

That is Allah, your Lord! In other words, the one whose creation and governance has just been described to you in these two verses is your Lord, and no other. This is because a lord is the sovereign who governs the affairs of his domain, and if God created you and everything besides you, and set in motion the cosmic order that governs you and everything else, then He is the one who has dominion over you and looks after your affairs. Therefore, He—and no one else—is your Lord.

To Him belongs all sovereignty means that He has dominion over all of His creations in this world and the hereafter. Therefore He is the absolute sovereign. The position of *lahu* (To Him) before *al-mulk* (sovereignty) in the sentence *lahu l-mulk* shows that this sovereignty belongs exclusively to Him. This sentence is also an additional predicate for the sentence *That is Allah,* as is *There is no god except Him.* Furthermore, God's exclusive claim to divinity is the logical corollary of His exclusive claim to lordship, because a deity is only worshipped because he is a lord who governs over the affairs of his servants and is therefore worshipped by them either because they fear him, because they place their hope in him, or because they wish to give thanks to him.

Then where are you being led away? In other words, how can you turn away from His worship to the worship of others, while He is your Lord, who created you and looked after your affairs, and your sovereign master?

إِنْ تَكْفُرُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنْكُمْ ۖ وَلَا يَرْضَىٰ لِعِبَادِهِ الْكُفْرَ ۖ وَإِنْ
تَشْكُرُوا يَرْضَهُ لَكُمْ ۗ وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ۗ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ
مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ۚ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ﴿٧﴾

(39:7) ***If you are ungrateful, indeed Allah has no need of you, though He does not approve ingratitude for His servants; and if you give thanks He approves that for you. No bearer shall bear another's burden; then to your Lord will be your return, whereat He will inform you concerning what you used to do. Indeed He knows best what is in the breasts.***

This verse emphasizes that the call to monotheism and to dedicate one's faith exclusively to God does not arise out of any need on His part; He does not need them to worship Him instead of worshipping other deities. On the contrary, He calls them to monotheism out of concern for them, as this is tantamount to calling them towards their own happiness in this world and the next. His concern for them in this regard is no different from the concern He shows for providing them with sustenance by pouring out His blessings upon them; it is because He is concerned for their wellbeing that He inspires them to protect themselves from harm.

If you are ungrateful, indeed Allah has no need of you: This is addressed to all free-willed moral agents (*mukallifin*). In other words, if you disbelieve in God by rejecting monotheism, He has no need of you for His own sake; just as your faith and obedience do not benefit Him the least, neither do your disbelief and disobedience harm Him one iota. Benefit and harm only apply to beings that are contingent and needful; the Necessary Existent is absolutely self-sufficient by virtue of His own essence, and, therefore, it is inconceivable that benefit or harm could apply to Him.

He remarks *though He does not approve ingratitude for His servants* to prevent anyone from supposing that *Allah has no need of you* means that because God neither benefits from our belief nor is harmed by our disbelief, there is no reason why He should desire us to believe in and give thanks to Him. He repels this supposition by saying that divine solicitude (*ʿināya*) for humankind means that He does not approve of your disbelief while you are His servants.

The meaning of *ingratitude* (kufr) here is to be ungrateful for God's blessings (*kufr al-niʿma*) based on the fact that this is juxtaposed with the sentence *and if you give thanks He approves that for you.* From this, it is clear that He uses the phrase *for His servants* rather than *for you* to call attention to the underlying principle behind why He does not approve of ingratitude.

In short, this is because you are God's servants over whom He has dominion and who are immersed in His blessings. This is a relationship of masterhood and servanthood—which is a relationship between a master and a slave—and, as such, it does not allow for the servant to be ungrateful for the kindness of his master, to forget his master's authority, to choose other masters for himself, to disobey his own master and obey His enemy, while in truth he belongs to his master and has no ability to benefit or harm his own self.

…and if you give thanks He approves of that for you: 'That' refers to thanksgiving, as in the verse *Be fair; that is nearer to Godwariness* (5:8). Therefore, the meaning is that if you give thanks to God, which is the proper course of action as His servants, and dedicate your faith to Him, then He approves of this for you while you are His servants. The opposition between the concepts of *shukr* (gratitude) and *kufr* (ingratitude) corresponds to the opposition between those of *īmān* (faith) and *kufr* (disbelief).

From the above, it is clear that the term servants in the phrase *He does not approve ingratitude for His servants* is universal, encompassing all of God's servants.

Some commentators have argued that this term is actually particular in its meaning, referring to those servants mentioned by God in the verse *Indeed as for My servants you do not have any authority over them, except the perverse who follow you* (15:42), meaning those who are the devoted (*mukhliṣūn*) or divinely protected from sin (*maʿṣūmūn*) according to al-Zamakhsharī. This would mean that God approves of belief for those who believe and disbelief for those who disbelieve, save for those who are divinely protected, for He only desires them to believe and protects them from disbelief. However, this is evidently nonsensical, as the context of the verse does not admit such a reading. Were we to read the verse in this way, it would indicate that God approved of the disbeliever's disbelief, in which case the full meaning would be as follows: *If you are ungrateful, indeed Allah has no need of you, though He does not approve ingratitude for the prophets [for example], because He only approves of faith for them. And if you give thanks, then He approves of that for you, and if you are ungrateful He approves of that for you.* As you can see, this renders the verse utterly pointless, especially given that it occurs within the context of a call to monotheism.

In addition to this, insofar as the prophets, for example, are included amongst those who give thanks and God has approved gratitude and faith for them, and He has not approved disbelief for them, there is no need for God to single them out for mention when He has already mentioned His approval of those who give thanks.

No bearer shall bear another's burden: In other words, no soul shall carry the weight of another's deeds, and no one will be punished for a sin they did not commit.

…then to your Lord will be your return, whereat He will inform you concerning what you used to do. Indeed He knows best what is in

the breasts: Meaning that whether someone is grateful or ungrateful in this world, God will bring them back, reveal to them the reality of their deeds, and hold them to account for the content of their hearts, and we have already discussed the significance of such statements in the Qur'an previously.

A Discourse on the Meaning of God's Approval or Displeasure

Riḍā (approval or satisfaction) is a concept that is applied to sentient free-willed beings; its opposite is *sukhṭ* (displeasure). Both of these are affirmative attributes, in that they describe the existence of a state rather than the absence of one.

The objects of approval are typically qualities and actions rather than entities. For example, one might say: 'He approved x for him,' or 'He was satisfied with x.' For example, see the verse: *if they had been pleased with what Allah and His Messenger gave them* (9:59), or the verse: *who are pleased with the life of this world* (10:7). On occasion, the object of approval might be an entity, but this is only from a specific vantage point that devolves to the Hereafter, as in the verse: *Never will the Jews be pleased with you, nor the Christians* (2:120).

Approving of something is not identical with willing it (*irāda*), even if the object of a person's approval and the object of their willing are one and the same. This is because, in some sense, something can only be the object of a person's approval after it has already come to pass. On the other hand—according to some—to will something means that it has not yet come to pass, while to approve of something means that it already has (or that one *supposes* that it has come to pass). Therefore, for a person to approve of an action means that he finds it agreeable and is not repelled by it, and approval is an attribute that inheres in the approver rather than the object of approval.

Therefore, insofar as approval is fixed upon something after it has come to pass, the existence of approval is concomitant with the existence of the thing approved of. This, in turn, means that approval cannot be an essential attribute of God's (*ṣifat al-dhāt*) because the divine essence is transcendent above being a locus of change. Hence, God's approval is an attribute of action (*ṣifat al-fiʿl*) that is abstracted from Him, akin to mercy, wrath, willing, or disliking. In the Qur'an we read:

> *…Allah is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him…* (98:8)

…and that I may do righteous deeds which may please You… (27:19)

…and I have approved Islam as your religion… (5:3)

For God to approve of something, then, it means that He finds it in agreement with His action. This is insofar as God's actions can be divided into two categories: natural (*takwīnī*) and moral (*tashrīʿī*). Therefore, His approval can likewise be divided into the two categories of natural and moral. So, every natural phenomenon—which is something God has willed and brought into being—is something of which He approves in the sense that His natural approval is fixed upon it, because it is His own action, and He brought it forth in accordance with His will (*mashiyya*). Conversely, every moral phenomenon—namely, something with which a moral duty is associated, whether in belief or in action, such as faith and righteous deeds—is something of which He approves in the sense that His moral approval is fixed upon it, in the sense that the one who performs it has acted in agreement with His moral commandments.

On the other hand, God's approval is never fixed upon the opposite of these moral commandments, namely those things that He has forbidden. This is because these things are not in harmony with His moral commandments—for example, disbelief and immorality. God says: *If you are ungrateful, indeed Allah has no need of you, though He does not approve ingratitude for His servants* (39:7) and *But even if you are reconciled to them Allah shall not be reconciled to the transgressing lot* (9:96).

Commentary continues:

وَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ ضُرٌّ دَعَا رَبَّهُ مُنِيبًا إِلَيْهِ ثُمَّ إِذَا خَوَّلَهُ نِعْمَةً مِنْهُ نَسِيَ مَا كَانَ يَدْعُو إِلَيْهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَجَعَلَ لِلَّهِ أَنْدَادًا لِيُضِلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ ۚ قُلْ تَمَتَّعْ بِكُفْرِكَ قَلِيلًا ۖ إِنَّكَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ النَّارِ ﴿٨﴾

(39:8) ***When distress befalls man, he supplicates his Lord, turning to Him penitently. Then, when He grants him a blessing from Himself, he forgets that for which he had supplicated Him before, and sets up equals to Allah that he may lead [people] astray from His way. Say, 'Revel in your ingratitude for a while. Indeed you are among the inmates of the Fire.'***

According to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, *ināba* (to turn penitently) means to

return to God; *takhwīl* (to grant a blessing) means to bestow a great gift upon someone.

After what the previous verse said about being ungrateful for God's blessings and that, while God has no need of people, He does not approve of disbelief for them, the present verse calls attention to the fact that the human being seems naturally predisposed towards ingratitude. This is despite his knowing God through his innate nature (*fiṭra*) and not hesitating to return to God in his hour of need and beg Him to alleviate his suffering. As God says elsewhere: *And man is very ungrateful* (17:67); *Indeed man is most unfair and ungrateful* (14:34).

When distress befalls man, he supplicates his Lord, turning to Him penitently—meaning that when the human being finds himself in difficulty, whether because of hardship, illness, drought, or the like thereof, he invokes his Lord—God, whose lordship he readily acknowledges—and turns to Him, casting aside everyone besides Him, pleading for Him to grant him relief from his suffering.

Then, when He grants him a blessing from Himself, he forgets that for which he had supplicated Him before…: Such that when his Lord answers his prayers and blesses him with relief from his suffering, the human being becomes completely occupied with this blessing and forgets the hardship which he had previously invoked God to alleviate.

Therefore, the *mā* in the phrase *mā kāna yadʿū ilayh* (that for which he had supplicated Him before) serves as a relative pronoun (*mawṣūl*), referring to the aforementioned *distress* (ḍarr) that had afflicted him, while *ilayh* signifies *for which.* On the other hand, some have said that *mā* here is gerundival (*maṣdariyya*, meaning that it causes the verb to behave as a noun), while *ilayh* signifies *to Him* (that is, God). This renders the meaning of the verse: 'He forgets the supplications he had made to his Lord before he received these blessings.' Others have said that the phrase means *he forgets the one to whom he used to supplicate* (meaning God). However, this is the most unlikely of the possible readings.

…and sets up equals to Allah that he may lead people astray from His way—andād (equals), according to some, refers to idols and false deities, while the *lām* in *liyuḍill ʿan sabīlih* (that he may lead people astray from His way) signifies the consequence of his actions. In other words: He sets up equals to God that share in His lordship and divinity, and, as a result, he leads people astray from the way of God, because people are naturally inclined to follow those in authority (*taqlīd*) and resemble one another. And he can lead people astray through his actions as readily as he can

through his words.

It is not unlikely that the term *equals* here is being used to refer not only to idols or false deities but also to anything that people rely upon and depend upon instead of God, which also includes idols as well. This reading is to be preferred because it applies to all human beings, whether or not they are idolaters, although the focus of the verse is the disbelievers.

Say, 'Revel in your ingratitude for a while. Indeed you are among the inmates of the Fire': In other words, enjoy yourself while it lasts, because you are destined for hellfire and will soon enter it. This is an example of the imperative form (*Revel*) being used to convey a threat in the sense of foretelling the future. In short: 'You are destined for hellfire, and your revelling in ingratitude for a few days will not protect you from it.'

أَمَّنْ هُوَ قَانِتٌ آنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ سَاجِدًا وَقَائِمًا يَحْذَرُ الْآخِرَةَ وَيَرْجُو رَحْمَةَ رَبِّهِ ۗ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ۗ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٩﴾

(39:9) ***Is he who is devout in the watches of the night, prostrating and standing, apprehensive of the Hereafter and expecting the mercy of his Lord…? Say, 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?' Only those who possess intellect take admonition.***

This verse has a connection to the previous verse, *No bearer shall bear another's burden* (39:7), for its implication was that those who are ungrateful for God's blessings and those who give thanks to their Lord are not equal, and they will not be mixed with one another. This is made explicit in the present verse, which says that the one who invokes God fearing His punishment and hoping for His mercy is not equal to others.

However, the sentence *Is he who is devout in the watches of the night, prostrating and standing, apprehensive of the Hereafter and expecting the mercy of his Lord…?* is just one half of the question, with the remainder left implicit. The implicit meaning is: 'Is a person such as the one described above better or this one who is devout…?'

According to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *qunūṭ* (devoutness) means to be continuously obedient and humble before God, while *ānāʾ* (watches) is the plural of *anā*, which refers to a moment of time. *Apprehensive of the Hereafter* means to be fearful of God's punishment in the Hereafter, as per the verse: *Indeed your Lord's punishment is a thing to beware of* (17:57). This, along with the description of such a person as *expecting the mercy*

of his Lord combines the two traits of fearing punishment and hoping for mercy. Notice, however, that the verse does not restrict God's mercy to the Hereafter, for perhaps the mercy of the Hereafter encompasses this world as well.

Hence, the meaning of this passage is as follows: 'Is this disbeliever who is destined to be an inmate of the hellfire better or the one who is continuously obedient and submissive to his Lord in the depths of the night, prostrating himself in prayer sometimes and standing in worship at others, fearing the punishment of the Hereafter but also hoping for the mercy of his Lord?' In other words: They are not alike.

Say, 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?': Knowledge and its absence appear here as two absolutes. However, based on the context of the verse, what is meant here by knowledge (*ʿilm*) and the lack thereof is the knowledge of God, for it is through knowing God that the human being becomes complete. This is a knowledge that a human being benefits from in the truest sense of the word and whose absence is harmful to him. Other forms of knowledge are like wealth; a person benefits from them in the life of this world, but they pass away with this world.

Only those who possess intellect take admonition: This sentence serves as an explanation of why the two groups are not equal; one group ponders on the realities of things while the other does not, so they are not equal. On the contrary, those who have knowledge are superior to those who do not.

قُلْ يَا عِبَادِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمْ ۚ لِلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا فِي هَٰذِهِ الدُّنْيَا
حَسَنَةٌ ۗ وَأَرْضُ اللَّهِ وَاسِعَةٌ ۗ إِنَّمَا يُوَفَّى الصَّابِرُونَ أَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿١٠﴾

(39:10) ***Say, 'O My servants who have faith! Be wary of your Lord. For those who do good in this world there will be good, and Allah's earth is vast. Indeed the patient will be paid in full their reward without any reckoning.'***

The prepositional phrase *in this world* is attached to *those who do good,* meaning that those who do good—by continuously doing good deeds—shall receive goodness that is beyond description.

Notice that the good promised to them is absolute; it is not restricted to this world or the hereafter. This suggests that those who believe and do good deeds shall have good in this world in the form of a happy heart, a healthy spirit, and a soul kept safe from the confusion, inner conflict, anxiety, and powerlessness that the faithless feel in this world because

they find themselves at the mercy of forces beyond their control without anyone to rely upon for aid or assistance or to find peace with in times of adversity. Meanwhile, those who believe will also have good in this world in the form of eternal happiness and everlasting comfort.

Some have said that *in this world* is attached to *there will be good,* meaning that the faithful are promised good in this world. However, this is not the case.

…and Allah's earth is vast: This encourages the faithful to emigrate from Mecca, because remaining in it will be difficult for those who believe in the Prophet while the idolaters intensify their persecution and torment of them day-by-day. However, in terms of how it is phrased, this statement is intended to be understood as a universal maxim and not restricted to the time and circumstances of the Prophet and his followers.

Some have said that *Allah's earth* is a reference to paradise, meaning that paradise is so vast that you will not be confined therein, so win paradise for yourselves through obeying God and worshipping Him. However, this meaning is unlikely.

…Only the patient will be paid in full their reward without any reckoning: To be paid in full' means to be given everything that you are owed, and the tone of the verse indicates that the restriction *only* is directed to the prepositional phrase *without any reckoning,* which qualifies *paid in full.* In other words, the patient (*ṣābirūn*) will only be given their rewards *without any reckoning.* Therefore, the patient will not be expected to account for their deeds, nor will their record of deeds be unfurled, and nor will their reward be measured out according to their deeds.

Note that *the patient* in this verse is left absolute; it is not restricted to those who are patient in obedience, those patient in avoiding sins, or those patient in times of hardship (even if the context of the verse suggests that it refers to patience in relation to the hardships of this world and especially persecution at the hands of the faithless for believing in God, dedicating their faith exclusively to Him, and being wary of Him).

Some have said: *without any reckoning* is an adverbial qualifier for *their rewards* and signifies the bounteous rewards with which they will be paid in full. However, the previous reading is more accurate.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Ibn Mardawayh narrates from Yazīd al-Raqqāshī that a man said to the Prophet: 'O Messenger of God, we give our wealth charitably in the hopes of being remembered

for our generosity, will we be rewarded for this kind of giving?' The Messenger of God replied: 'Indeed God does not accept the deeds of anyone save those who dedicate their faith exclusively to Him.' Then he recited the verse: *Look! Only exclusive faith is for Allah* (39:3).

(2) In the same source, Ibn Jarīr narrates via Juwaybir from Ibn ʿAbbās, about the verse, *and those who take guardians besides Him* (39:3): 'This was revealed about three tribes: the ʿĀmir, the Kināna, and the Banū Salama. They used to worship idols and claim that the angels were God's daughters, claiming: *We only worship them so that they may bring us near to Allah!*'

Author's comments: This verse is general and encompasses all manner of idolaters. The statement, 'We only worship them so that they may bring us near to God,' is what all idolaters say. The same is true of the belief that God has a son. Furthermore, there is nothing in the verse about believing that the angels were God's daughters. Therefore, the truth is that this report is an example of applying a general verse to a specific situation (*taṭbīq*).

(3) In *al-Kāfī* and *ʿIlal al-Sharāʾīʿ*, al-Kulaynī and al-Ṣadūq narrate via their chains of narrators from Zurāra that he asked Imam al-Bāqir about *in the watches of the night, prostrating and standing* (39:9). He said: 'It means the night prayer *(ṣalāt al-layl)*.'

(4) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates, via a chain of narrators going back to Imam al-Bāqir, about the verse *'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?' Only those who possess intellect take admonition* (39:9): 'We are those who know, our enemies are those who do not know, and our followers (*shīʿa*) are those who possess intellect.'

Author's comments: This interpretation of the verse is narrated via numerous chains from Imam al-Bāqir and Imam al-Ṣādiq. However, it is an example of extending the meaning of the verse (*jarī*) and not an explanation of it (*tafsīr*).

(5) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Ibn Saʿd narrates in his *Ṭabaqāt* and Ibn Mardawayh narrates from Ibn ʿAbbās about the verse *Is he who is devout in the watches of the night, prostrating and standing* (39:9): 'It was revealed about ʿAmmār b. Yāsir.'

Author's comments: A similar report has been narrated from Juwaybir from ʿIkrima, and also from Juwaybir from Ibn ʿAbbās, that this verse was revealed about Ibn Masʿūd and ʿAmmār and Sālim, the freedman of Abū Ḥudhayfa. Meanwhile, Abū Nuʿaym and Ibn ʿAsākir narrate from Ibn

ʿUmar that it was revealed about ʿUthmān, and there are others besides. However, all of these narrations are examples of applying a general verse to specific instances (*taṭbīq*) rather than genuine occasions of revelation (*nuzūl*), and this chapter was revealed in a single go.

(6) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī narrates from ʿAyyāshī via his chain of narrators from ʿAbdallāh b. Sinān from Imam al-Ṣādiq that the Prophet said: 'When the records of deeds are unfurled and the scales for the weighing of deeds are set up, there will be no scale set up for the people of tribulation (*ahl al-balāʾ*), nor shall any record of deeds be opened for them.' Then he recited the verse: *Indeed the patient will be paid in full their reward without any reckoning* (39:10).

Author's comments: A tradition with the same meaning has been narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr* from Ibn Mardawayh, from Anas b. Mālik, from the Prophet.

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Verses 11 to 20

This passage appears to return to the original theme of the chapter, commanding the Prophet to inform them that he too must answer the call summoning them to monotheism and to dedicate their faith exclusively to God, and that he is no different from them in this regard. To this, he adds that he has been commanded to be the first of those who submit to this call, namely that he should be calling them to something that he has already believed in and submitted himself to, regardless of whether they accept his call or reject it.

Therefore, he says they should not expect his actions to differ from his words, or his way of life to differ from his proclamation; he answers the call of his Lord and submits to Him and follows His religion, afraid to disobey Him. Then he warns the disbelievers and gives glad tidings to the believers that what God has promised both groups in terms of punishment or blessings will surely come to pass.

قُلْ إِنِّي أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ الدِّينَ ﴿١١﴾ وَأُمِرْتُ لِأَنْ أَكُونَ أَوَّلَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴿١٢﴾

(39:11–12) ***Say, 'Indeed I have been commanded to worship Allah with exclusive faith in Him, and I have been commanded to be the first of those who submit.'***

This passage represents a recapitulation of the message at the beginning of the chapter: *Indeed We have sent down the Book to you with the truth; so worship Allah, putting exclusive faith in Him* (39:2). God commands the Prophet to tell his people this so that they will realize they have no hope of convincing him to give up his mission or endorse their association of partners with God, just as is referenced at the beginning of Sūrah Ṣād and in other verses of the Qur'an.

It is as if God wants His Messenger to say: 'Be aware that when I recited to you God's commands to worship Him and dedicate my faith exclusively to Him, these commands were not merely directed to me as a form of indirect address to you, so that you would hear them and obey them. Rather, just like you, I am also commanded to worship God and dedicate my faith to Him. Not only that, but I have been commanded to

be the first of those who submit to the revelation that has been sent down to me, so I submit to it first and then convey it to others, for I do indeed fear my Lord and worship Him with sincere devotion, whether you believe in Him or not, so do not expect me to change.'

The statement, *And I have been commanded to be the first of those who submit,* also alludes to the fact that the command addressed to the Prophet contains duties that are additional to those addressed to his audience, namely: 'I have been commanded to do what you have been commanded to do, but it has been directed to me first, and the reason for this is so that I become the first to submit to this commandment and to believe in it.'

Some have said that the *lām* in *li-an akūna* (translated as 'to be') signifies an explanation, meaning 'I have been commanded to do that so that I will be the first of those who submit.' Others have said that the *lām* is superfluous, as it has been omitted in the verse, *Say, 'I have been commanded to be the first of those who submit'* (6:14). However, both readings ultimately yield the same meaning, namely that his being the first of those who submit provides a rubric for his submission, but this rubric can also be the purpose behind the command for him to submit. For example, just as one can say, 'Strike him for discipline', one can also say, 'discipline him with a strike.'

In *al-Kashshāf*, al-Zamakhsharī writes: 'The most appropriate readings of the verse are as follows: (1) "To be the first of those who submit in my time and from my people," because he was the first person to contravene the religion of his forefathers and to drag down the idols and break them, and (2) "to be the first of those who call them to submit," and (3) "to be the first one to call himself to that to which he calls others," and (4) "to be an exemplar in both my words and deeds, and not to be akin to those rulers who order others to do that which they do not do themselves," and (5) "to act in such a way that my behavior becomes a model of submission for all others to follow."'

However, the astute reader will see that the third meaning given here is the most appropriate for the overall context of the verse, and it is this meaning that we have presented above.

قُلْ إِنِّي أَخَافُ إِنْ عَصَيْتُ رَبِّي عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٣﴾

(39:13) ***Say, 'Indeed, should I disobey my Lord, I fear the punishment of a tremendous day.'***

Based on the context in which it appears, *disobey my Lord* means to

contravene His command to worship Him and exclusively dedicate one's faith to Him, while the *tremendous day* is the Day of Resurrection. This verse lays the ground for the following one.

قُلِ اللَّهَ أَعْبُدُ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ دِينِي ﴿١٤﴾ فَاعْبُدُوا مَا شِئْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ ۗ قُلْ إِنَّ الْخَاسِرِينَ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَأَهْلِيهِمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ۗ أَلَا ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الْخُسْرَانُ الْمُبِينُ ﴿١٥﴾

(39:14–15) ***Say, 'Only Allah do I worship, putting my exclusive faith in Him. So worship whatever you wish besides Him.' Say, 'Indeed the losers are those who lose themselves and their families on the Day of Resurrection.' Look! That is a manifest loss!***

This verse makes explicit that he is acting in obedience to his Lord's command, which is what the previous verse hinted at, showing them that they have no hope for him to disobey God.

Placing the object before its verb in the phrase, *Only Allah do I worship,* signifies exclusivity (*ḥaṣr*), and the adverbial phrase, *putting my exclusive faith in Him* emphasizes this meaning. While the imperative, *So worship whatever you wish besides Him*, is used as a threat, namely that whatever they worship besides Him will not avail them in the least, for they will suffer the consequences of their turning aside from worshipping God exclusively, which is also alluded to by the last part of the verse: *Say, 'Indeed the losers…'*

Say, 'Indeed the losers are those who lose themselves and their families on the Day of Resurrection': *Khusr* and *khusrān* means to lose one's capital, whether in part or in full, and *khusrān* is a more profound statement of loss than *khusr*. To lose one's self means to expose it to danger and misery, such that it loses the potential for perfection and, thereby, loses out on happiness in such a way that it does not even hope for it. The same is true for the loss of one's family.

The verse speaks obliquely to the idolaters whom it addresses with the words: *So worship whatever you wish besides Him,* as if to say: 'No matter what you worship, you are losing yourselves by placing them in danger through your disbelief, and you are losing your nearest and dearest by inciting them to disbelief and idolatry, which is a true state of loss.'

Look! That is a manifest loss! This is because even the losses associated with this world are ultimately transient and fleeting, while losses on the Day of Judgment are permanent and eternal, they will never come to

an end. Whatever worldly wealth or status a person loses, after this loss subsides, they might yet regain what they had lost or even attain something better than it as a result. This is not the case with someone who loses themselves.

The interpretation given above assumes that the meaning of *ahl* (family) in the verse refers to a person's nearest and dearest in this world. However, some have suggested that it might also refer to what God has placed in store for the human being in paradise, should they believe and act righteously, in the form of wives, servants, and others. They argue that this reading is better and more appropriate because all familial ties and worldly social bonds are broken on the Day of Judgment. For example, we read in the verse: *there will be no ties between them on that day* (23:101), *It is a day when no soul will be of any avail to another soul* (82:19). And there are other verses besides this.

This reading is also supported by the verse: *Then as for him who is given his record in his right hand, he shall soon receive an easy reckoning, and he will return to his folks joyfully* (84:7–9).

لَهُمْ مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ ظُلَلٌ مِنَ النَّارِ وَمِنْ تَحْتِهِمْ ظُلَلٌ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ يُخَوِّفُ اللَّهُ بِهِ عِبَادَهُ ۚ يَا عِبَادِ فَاتَّقُونِ ﴿١٦﴾

(39:16) ***There will be canopies of fire above them, and canopies beneath them. With that Allah deters His servants. So, My servants, be wary of Me!***

Ẓilal (canopies) is the plural of *ẓulla*, which some have said refers to an elevated covering.

The reason this verse says there is a canopy of fire above them and another below is to show that they are completely surrounded by the flames. The remainder of the meaning is clear.

وَالَّذِينَ اجْتَنَبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ أَنْ يَعْبُدُوهَا وَأَنَابُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ لَهُمُ الْبُشْرَىٰ ۚ فَبَشِّرْ عِبَادِ ﴿١٧﴾ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَاهُمُ اللَّهُ ۖ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمْ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿١٨﴾

(39:17-18) ***As for those who stay clear of the worship of the Rebel and turn penitently to Allah, there is good news for them. So give good news to My servants who listen to the word and follow the***

best of it. They are the ones whom Allah has guided, and it is they who possess intellect.

Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī says that *al-ṭāghūt* (the Rebel) refers to anything that people invoke or worship besides God, and that the same term can be used for the singular and the plural. Based on the context, it appears that what is meant by *ṭāghūt* in this verse are the idols and every false deity besides God.

Note that this verse does not merely say to stay clear of worshipping *ṭāghūt*, it also says that they should *turn penitently to Allah.* This shows that it is not enough simply to negate the false gods, but, rather, in order to profit, the human being must combine this negation with positive action in the forming of worshipping God while forsaking the worship of all others. And this is the meaning of worshipping Him while placing exclusive faith in Him.

There is good news for them is the predicate of the phrase *those who stay clear…* and it means they will be delivered good news.

So give good news to My servants, who listen to the word and follow the best of it…: At first glance, it would have seemed more straightforward to say so give them good news. Instead, however, the verse says *give good news to My servants,* with the addition of the possessive pronoun *My.* This is both to show their nobility and to facilitate the description of them with *who listen…*

Based on what has already been said about *to follow* suggesting a connection to practical actions, it would appear that *the best* of *the word* is the part that best guides people to the truth and contains the most useful advice for the human being. If a person is one of those who loves what is good and is attracted to what is beautiful, the more good he sees, the more attracted to it he will be; if he is given the choice between good and bad, he will incline to good, and if he is given the choice between good and better, he will aim for what is better. On the other hand, if someone does not incline to what is best but contents themselves with what is good, this shows that they are not actually attracted to it because it is good, or else they would have been more strongly attracted to that which was better.

Therefore, when this verse describes them as following *the best* of *the word,* this means that it is in their character to seek the truth, pursue good guidance, and find the reality of things, such that whenever there is a choice to be made between truth and falsehood or between guidance and error, they follow truth and guidance and turn away from falsehood and error. Conversely, whenever there is a choice to be made between what

is true and what is truer, or between good guidance and better guidance, they will also choose what is truer and better over what is not.

In other words, their goal is truth and guidance, and for this reason they listen to the word and do not reject something because it is unfamiliar to them or because it conflicts with their own personal desires; before making a decision, they will first ponder upon it and comprehend it.

Therefore, the meaning of *who listen to the word and follow the best of it,* is that it is because they are already seeking truth and guidance that they listen to the word in the hope that they might find truth in it and out of fear that they might miss any truth it contains.

Some have said that the meaning of them listening to the word and following the best of it is that they listen to the Qur'an and other words as well, but they follow the Qur'an.

Others have said that it means that they listen to God's commandments and follow the best of them. For example, when given the choice between retribution (*qiṣāṣ*) or forgiveness (*ʿafuww*) in the case of the murderer, they choose forgiveness; or given the choice between giving charity openly and giving it secretly, they opt for the latter.

However, both of these interpretations arbitrarily render the meaning of the verse specific without any specifier.

The sentence, *they are the ones whom Allah has guided…*, shows that this characteristic of theirs is a form of divine guidance, and this guidance—by which I mean the quality of seeking the truth and being completely prepared to follow the truth wherever it leads—is a form of general guidance, from which flows all other forms of specific guidance to the divine teachings.

…and it is they who possess intellect: The word *lubb* ('intellect,' pl. *albāb*) here is used as equivalent to *ʿaql* (pl. *ʿuqūl*). This shows that the intellect is the faculty through which the human being is guided to the truth and the mark of someone who possesses intellect is that they follow the truth. We have already discussed in our commentary on the verse, *And who will renounce Abraham's creed except one who fools himself?* (2:130), that the intellect is the faculty through which one follows the religion of God.

أَفَمَنْ حَقَّ عَلَيْهِ كَلِمَةُ الْعَذَابِ أَفَأَنْتَ تُنْقِذُ مَنْ فِي النَّارِ ﴿١٩﴾

(39:19) ***Can he against whom the word of punishment has become due? Can you rescue someone who is in the Fire?***

To say that *the word of punishment has become due* against someone means that they must enter hellfire for their disbelief, based on what God told Adam when he fell to earth, *But those who are faithless and deny Our signs, they shall be the inmates of the Fire and they shall remain in it forever* (2:39), and other similar verses.

Based on the context of the verse, the question *Can you rescue someone who is in the Fire?* implies, 'Can you rescue someone against whom the word of punishment has become due?' This is more appropriate than reading the first part of the verse as meaning: 'Is he against whom the word of punishment has become due <u>better, or he to whom paradise is due?</u>'

Some have said it means, 'Can one against whom God's threat of punishment has become due, can you save him from the Fire?' but that God used the expression *someone who is in the Fire* instead of *him* and brought a second interrogative particle to emphasise this meaning.

Others have said it means 'Can you rescue <u>one of them</u> who is in the Fire?' but that the pronoun was omitted, and this is the weakest of interpretations.

لَٰكِنِ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ لَهُمْ غُرَفٌ مِنْ فَوْقِهَا غُرَفٌ مَبْنِيَّةٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ۖ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ ۖ لَا يُخْلِفُ اللَّهُ الْمِيعَادَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(39:20) ***But as for those who are wary of their Lord, for them there will be lofty abodes with lofty abodes built above them, with streams running beneath them a promise of Allah. Allah does not break His promise.***

Ghuruf (lofty abodes) is the plural of *ghurfa*, which means an elevated home. Some have said that this description of abodes above abodes is intended to contrast with the earlier description of the faithless in Hell: *There will be canopies of fire above them, and canopies beneath them* (39:16).

…a promise of Allah—meaning that has God promised them that, the Arabic *waʿd* (promise) *Allāh* is an absolute object (*mafʿūl al-muṭlaq*) used in place of the verbal phrase 'God has promised this', and the saying *Allah does not break his promise* informs the Qur'an's audience of the divine custom (*sunna*) with regard to promises, and this is intended to provide reassurance to them.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is narrated from Abū al-Jārūd, from Imam

al-Bāqir, about the verse *Say, 'Indeed the losers are those who lose themselves and their families on the Day of Resurrection'* (39:15): 'They have swindled themselves and their families out of paradise.'

(2) In *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, about the verse *As for those who stay clear of the worship of the Rebel and turn penitently to Allah, there is good news for them* (39:17), al-Ṭabrisī narrates from Abū Baṣīr from Imam al-Ṣādiq: 'You are those who stay clear of the worship of the Rebel and turn penitently to God, for whoever obeys a tyrant has worshipped them.'

Author's comments: This is an extension of the verse's meaning to a new issue (*jarī*).

(3) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates from some of his colleagues, with an incomplete chain (*marfūᶜ*) from Hishām b. al-Ḥakam: 'Abū al-Ḥasan Mūsā b. Jaᶜfar said to me: "O Hishām! Surely God gives glad tidings to the people of intellect and understanding in His Book: *So give good news to My servants who listen to the word and follow the best of it. They are the ones whom Allah has guided, and it is they who possess intellect* (39:17–18)."'

(4) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī narrates from Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Abī Ḥātim from Zayd b. Aslam, about the verse, *As for those who stay clear of the worship of the Rebel,* (39:17): 'These two verses were revealed about three persons who used to say in the Age of Ignorance: "There is no god but God." This was Zayd b. ᶜAmr b. Nufayl, Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, and Salmān al-Fārsī.'

Author's comments: This is also narrated by al-Ṭabrisī in *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, from ᶜAbdallāh b. Zayd, and it is narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr* again from Ibn Mardawayh, from Ibn ᶜUmar, that it was revealed about Saᶜīd b. Zayd, Abū Dharr, and Salmān. It is also narrated from Juwaybir from Jābir b. ᶜAbdallāh that it was revealed about a man from the Helpers who freed seven slaves when the verse was revealed *It has seven gates* (15:44). However, all of these appear to be cases of applying narratives to the verses, rather than genuine occasions of revelation.

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Verses 21 to 37

The Qur'an now presents an argument for God's singular lordship, followed by a discussion of His guidance of the rightly guided and His allowing those in error to lose their way, and a comparison between the two groups and their respective fates. This passage also shows what is meant by the guidance of the Qur'an.

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَسَلَكَهُ يَنَابِيعَ فِي الْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ يُخْرِجُ بِهِ زَرْعًا مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَاهُ مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُ حُطَامًا ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَذِكْرَىٰ لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٢١﴾

(39:21) ***Have you not seen that Allah sends down water from the sky, then He conducts it through the ground as springs. Then with it He brings forth crops of diverse hues. Then they wither and you see them turn yellow. Then He turns them into chaff. There is indeed an admonition in that for those who possess intellect.***

In *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī writes:

> 'Yanābīᶜ (springs) is the plural of *yanbūᶜ* and denotes a place from which water issues forth, *zarᶜ* (crops) signifies a plant that grows without a trunk, in contrast to *shajar* (tree), which refers to a plant with a trunk and branches, while *nabāt* (vegetation) encompasses both categories. When plants wither (*yahīj*) they dry out and become desiccated, while *huṭam* (debris) denotes pieces of hay and grass.'

He conducts the water *through the ground as springs* means that God causes it to flow into springs and watercourses in the earth that function like veins which carry it from one place to another. The remainder of the meaning should be clear and, as the reader can see, the verse is an argument for God's sole lordship (*rubūbiyya*) of the cosmos.

أَفَمَنْ شَرَحَ اللَّهُ صَدْرَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ فَهُوَ عَلَىٰ نُورٍ مِنْ رَبِّهِ ۚ فَوَيْلٌ لِلْقَاسِيَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ مِنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

(39:22) ***Is someone whose breast Allah has opened to Islam so that***

he is upon a light from his Lord? So woe to those whose hearts have been hardened to the remembrance of Allah. They are in manifest error.

'Remembrance of God' (*dhikr Allāh*) here refers to the contents of the previous verse, which called attention to the sending down of water from the sky and the bringing forth of vegetation upon the earth, for this is a reminder for those who possess intellects. These, of course, are His Godwary servants, who we know from the earlier verses have been guided by God. In this verse we are told that they are not like other people, such as those who have gone astray, and the most obvious reason for this difference is that they are following a light from their Lord which allows them to perceive the truth and that their hearts are supple and not obstinate, so they are prepared to accept the best of the word when they encounter it.

The second part of the question, *Is someone whose breast Allah has opened…*, is implicit, but its meaning is indicated by the next part of the verse, *So woe to those whose hearts have been hardened…*—in other words, the full meaning of the question is *Is someone whose breast Allah has opened… akin to one whose heart has been hardened?* This, of course, is a rhetorical question whose import is to deny that the two are anything alike.

To open someone's breast (*sharḥ al-ṣadr*) means to expand it so that it can encompass the words it receives. If someone's breast is opened to Islam, which means to submit to the will of God, which is nothing but the truth, then this means that the person is such that they accept the truth when it is presented to them and do not reject it. However, it does not signify that they accept something without understanding or discernment. On the contrary, it means they accept it because they see that it is the truth and recognise it as good guidance. That is why the opening of the breast in this verse is followed by *so that he is upon a light from his Lord.* The use of the preposition *upon* (ʿalā) suggests an image of someone riding upon this light, travelling with it, and perceiving all the truth that he encounters with his expansive and open breast, which allows him to recognise it and distinguish between it and between falsehood. This is unlike the one who has strayed from the path, whose breast is too constrained to accept the truth and does not ride upon a light from his Lord to allow him to perceive it or distinguish it from other than it.

So woe to those whose hearts have been hardened to the remembrance of Allah… follows logically from the previous sentence, insofar as it shows that those with hardened hearts (and hardness of heart necessarily implies a contraction of the breast and the absence of any guiding light) do not

ponder on God's signs and, therefore, are not guided to the truth they point towards. That is why God terminates this verse with the coda: *They are in manifest error.*

Therefore, this verse provides a definition of guidance through its logical corollary, namely an openness of a person's breast and their being placed upon a light from their Lord. Conversely, it also provides a definition of going astray through its logical corollary, namely having one's heart hardened against the remembrance of God.

And we have already discussed the meaning of guidance in our commentary on the verse *Whomever Allah desires to guide, He opens his breast to Islam…* (6:125), so refer to this [commentary] for more information.

اللَّهُ نَزَّلَ أَحْسَنَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابًا مُتَشَابِهًا مَثَانِيَ تَقْشَعِرُّ مِنْهُ جُلُودُ الَّذِينَ
يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ ثُمَّ تَلِينُ جُلُودُهُمْ وَقُلُوبُهُمْ إِلَىٰ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُدَى اللَّهِ
يَهْدِي بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ وَمَنْ يُضْلِلِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ هَادٍ ﴿٢٣﴾

(39:23) ***Allah has sent down the best of discourses, a scripture of similar motifs, whereat quiver the skins of those who fear their Lord, then their skins and hearts soften to Allah's remembrance. That is Allah's guidance, by which He guides whomever He wishes; and whomever Allah leads astray has no guide.***

This verse acts almost as a summation in relation to the previous one, in that it relates to the meaning of guidance (*hidāya*), albeit as an explanation of the guidance of the Qur'an.

Allah has sent down the best of discourses…: This is the Qur'an, a discourse (*ḥadīth*) is a form of speech, as per the verse *Let them bring a discourse like it* (52:34) and the verse *So what discourse will they believe after this?* (77:50), and it is the best speech because it contains the pure truth, which falsehood cannot approach from any direction, and it is a noble discourse.

…a scripture of similar motifs…: *Mutashābih* (similar) is used here in the sense that its different parts resemble one another[1], not in the sense that is the opposite of *muḥkam* (clear), namely *ambiguous,* as *mutashābih* in this sense is a description of some of the verses of the Qur'an, while this is a description of the text as a whole.

1 Or, conforming in its various parts. Obviously, it refers to the fact that there is a consistency in the style of the Qur'an. (Ed.)

Mathānī (motifs) is the plural of *mathniya* (lit. folded), which signifies that some of its verses are attached to others, some of them refer to others, some of them clarify others, and some of them explain others. This is without there being any disagreement between them, such that none of them clash with one another or contradict one another. As God says elsewhere in the verse *Do they not contemplate the Qur'an? Had it been from other than Allah, they would have surely found much discrepancy in it* (4:82).

…whereat quiver the skins of those who fear their Lord…—this phrase is in the position of an adjective (*ṣifa*) for *scripture,* rather than a new sentence. *Iqshiʿrār* (to quiver) means for the skin to contract with intensity out of fear, in response to seeing or hearing something frightening. But this only befalls the people mentioned in this verse because they perceive their position in relation to the tremendousness of their Lord, such that, when they hear His speech, their attention turns to His greatness and magnificence, their hearts are overwhelmed by fear, and their skins begin to tremble and quiver.

…then their skins and hearts soften to Allah's remembrance: The verb *talīn* (soften) implies a sense of stillness and tranquillity, which is why it is made transitive here by the preposition *ilā* (to). This renders the meaning: *Then their skins and their hearts find tranquillity in Allah's remembrance and soften in order to receive it* or *…become softened to it* in the sense of being at peace with it.

Notice that the previous sentence did not mention their hearts quivering alongside their skins, because the meaning of hearts here is their souls, and souls do not quiver, rather they feel fear.

That is Allah's guidance, by which He guides whomever He wishes: In other words, the fact that their skins quiver upon hearing the Qur'an and then their skins and their hearts find tranquillity in God's remembrance is guidance. This is yet another definition of guidance that defines it through its logical corollary.

…by which He guides whomever He wishes…: Meaning, He guides through His guidance whoever of His servants He wishes, and the ones He wishes to guide are those who have not lost their capacity to receive guidance or become distracted by impediments to guidance such as sinfulness and wrongdoing. The tone of the verse further indicates that guidance is something that God dispenses out of His grace (*faḍl*); there is nothing that makes it obligatory for Him to guide people or requires Him to do so.

Some commentators have said that the demonstrative pronoun *dhalika* (that) in *That is Allah's guidance* refers to the Qur'an rather than the

experience of *those who fear their Lord* and that these verses demonstrate that guidance is the function of God alone and that no one else has a share in this with Him. However, the truth is that these verses do not demonstrate any such thing, even if the assertion itself is true, namely that guidance originally belongs to God and it can only be said to belong to those whom He has chosen amongst His servants by extension; it is not something they have earned or deserved by their own actions. This is what can be grasped from the verses: *Indeed it is the guidance of Allah which is the true guidance* (2:120); *Indeed with Us rests guidance* (92:12); *We made them leaders, guiding by Our command* (21:73); and *And indeed you guide to a straight path* (42:52).

This shows that guidance (*hidāya*) in its totality belongs to God, whether this is the guidance He bestows directly or the guidance He bestows through divinely guided intermediaries chosen from amongst His creatures. Therefore, any creature of His that He allows to go astray, because He did not guide them either through an intermediary or without one, there is no guide for them. That is the meaning of the coda of this verse: *and whomever Allah leads astray has no guide.* This phrase will appear again in a few verses time, and it is repeated by God time and again throughout the entirety of the Qur'an.

أَفَمَنْ يَتَّقِي بِوَجْهِهِ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ۚ وَقِيلَ لِلظَّالِمِينَ ذُوقُوا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

(39:24) ***What! Is someone who fends off with his face the terrible punishment on the Day of Resurrection? And the wrongdoers will be told, 'Taste what you used to earn.'***

This verse compares the people who will suffer punishment on the Day of Resurrection to those who will be kept safe from it; the former are those who went astray while the latter are those who followed God's guidance. This is why this verse is placed immediately after the preceding one.

The verse opens with a rhetorical question—'What! Is someone who…'—whose predicate is left implicit. Its full meaning is: 'Is someone who fends off… the terrible punishment on the Day of Resurrection akin to one who is safe from it?'

The adverbial phrase *on the Day of Resurrection* qualifies the verb *fends off,* showing that on the Day of Judgment he will use his face to protect himself from the terrible punishment because his hand, with which he

would have ordinarily protected himself from harm, is shackled to his neck—is such a person truly akin to one who is safe from punishment and to whom no harm will come? This is how some commentators have interpreted the verse.

Others have said that this interpretation of *fends off with his face* is incorrect, because the face is not a part of the body that can be used to protect oneself. Instead, this means that he uses all of himself in this world, or especially his countenance therein, to avoid the terrible punishment of the Day of Resurrection. Related to this, they say that the adverbial phrase *on the Day of Resurrection* does not qualify the verb *fends off* but the noun *the terrible punishment*. This interpretation reverses the meaning given above, such that the meaning becomes: 'Is the one who protects himself from the terrible punishment of the Day of Resurrection by being Godwary in this world like someone who persists in disbelief?' However, this reading is somewhat overwrought and unnatural.

And the wrongdoers will be told, 'Taste what you used to earn': They will be told this by the angels who watch over Hell. At first glance, it might have appeared more straightforward to use the pronoun they (as in 'and they will be told'). However, the Qur'an uses the noun *the wrongdoers* (*al-ẓālimīn*) to highlight the reason for their punishment, namely their wrongdoing (*ẓulm*) in this world.

كَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَأَتَاهُمُ الْعَذَابُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(39:25) ***Those who were before them denied, whereat the punishment overtook them whence they were not aware.***

In other words, it came at them from a direction they did not expect and thus they were taken by surprise and without warning, which is the worst way to be seized. This verse and those that follow it provide some details of the humiliating punishment that some of the disbelievers suffered in this world as an example to others like them.

فَأَذَاقَهُمُ اللَّهُ الْخِزْيَ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۖ وَلَعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةِ أَكْبَرُ ۚ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

(39:26) ***So Allah made them taste disgrace in the life of the world, and the punishment of the Hereafter will surely be greater, had they known.***

Khizy (disgrace) signifies abasement and humiliation, which God made them taste through the different kinds of punishment he meted out to them, such as earthquakes, drowning, being swallowed by the earth, being seized by the cry, being transformed into animals, or being slain.

وَلَقَدْ ضَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ لَّعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(39:27) ***Certainly we have drawn for mankind in this Qur'an every example, so that they may take admonition.***

In other words, we have presented every kind of example to them so that they might awaken from their slumber, draw a lesson, and take admonition from it.

قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا غَيْرَ ذِي عِوَجٍ لَّعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

(39:28) ***An Arabic Qur'an, without any deviousness, so that they may be Godwary.***

ʿIwaj (deviousness) literally means to be crooked or bent. The phrase *Qurʾānan ʿArabiyyan* (an Arabic Qur'an) is in the accusative case (*naṣb*) to signify that it is the subject of praise or is being singled out for mention, in the sense of 'I praise it as an Arabic Qur'an' or 'I single it out as an Arabic Qur'an.' Alternatively, it may be in the accusative case because it is an adverbial phrase being used in the meaning of an adjectival one.

ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا رَّجُلًا فِيهِ شُرَكَاءُ مُتَشَاكِسُونَ وَرَجُلًا سَلَمًا لِّرَجُلٍ هَلْ يَسْتَوِيَانِ مَثَلًا ۚ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ۚ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(39:29) ***Allah draws an example: a man jointly owned by several contending masters, and a man belonging entirely to one man: are the two equal in comparison? All praise belongs to Allah! But most of them do not know.***

Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī says that *shakis* (translated here as 'contending') means to be of spiteful character, and the phrase *shurakāʾ mutashākisūn* (contending masters) signifies that they are contending with one another because of their spiteful character. On the other hand, *salam* (belonging entirely) means that no one else has a share in his property.

This is a parable that God draws for the idolater who worships many different lords and deities, all of whom claim a share in him and therefore

dispute over him. One commands him to do what another forbids, and each one expects him to serve them to the exclusion of all others. On the other hand, the parable of the monotheist is someone who is in the service of but a single master and upon whom no one else has any claim. The monotheist can serve his master and do as he bids him without anyone else disputing this and thereby sowing confusion. The idolater, then, is the man who has many masters who contend with one another for his obedience, while the monotheist belongs entirely to a single master. The two are patently unequal in comparison, for the one who is in the service of a single master is assuredly in a better state than that of the one in the service of many.

This is a very simple parable that anyone could understand. However, it also contains a subtle hint to another verse of the Qur'an, *Had there been gods in them other than Allah, they would surely have fallen apart* (21:22), and, in doing so, evokes its argument against a multiplicity of lords and deities.

The Qur'an then says, *all praise belongs to Allah,* because serving Him is better than serving any others besides Him. *But most of them do not know* the superiority of serving Him over serving all others, even though this should be self-evident to anyone with the slightest degree of insight.

إِنَّكَ مَيِّتٌ وَإِنَّهُمْ مَيِّتُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ ثُمَّ إِنَّكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عِنْدَ رَبِّكُمْ تَخْتَصِمُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

(39:30–31) ***You will surely die, and they will surely die too. Then on the Day of Resurrection you will indeed contend before your Lord.***

The first verse prepares the ground for the message of the second one, namely that on the Day of Resurrection they will dispute in the presence of their Lord. The pronoun 'you' (*kum*) in *you will indeed contend* is addressed to the Prophet and his nation or specifically to the idolaters among them. According to al-Ṭabrisī in *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, *ikhtiṣām* (to contend) means that there are two parties, each of whom rejects the claims of the other.

Therefore, the meaning of these two verses is that the ultimate outcome for both you and for them is death, then you will all be brought into the presence of your Lord on the Day of Resurrection, whereat you will dispute with one another. And the Qur'an has already foretold what the Prophet will say: *And the Messenger will say, 'O my Lord! Indeed my people*

consigned this Qur'an to oblivion.' (25:30)

These two verses are also universal in terms of their wording, but the next four verses indicate that the *contending* they mention refers to what will transpire between the Prophet and the disbelievers from his nation on the Day of Resurrection.

فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ كَذَبَ عَلَى اللَّهِ وَكَذَّبَ بِالصِّدْقِ إِذْ جَاءَهُ ۚ أَلَيْسَ فِي جَهَنَّمَ مَثْوًى لِلْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

(39:32) ***So who is a greater wrongdoer than him who attributes a falsehood to Allah, and denies the truth when it reaches him? Is not the abode of the faithless in hell?***

This verse and those following it are quick to mention what will be the outcome of this disputation on the Day of Resurrection, and they suggest that it will take a form of God's Judgment between the parties. It is as if to say: 'The verdict of God's Judgment between you is already known now, and it is already known which of you will be saved and which of you will perish. The Judgment on that day will depend on whether you acted wrongfully or rightfully in this world. On the one hand, there is no greater wrongdoer than the disbeliever, while on the other the believer is Godwary and acts virtuously. Wrongdoing leads to hell, while acting virtuously leads to paradise.' This is what the context and tone of the verse suggests.

So who is a greater wrongdoer than him who attributes a falsehood to Allah…? In other words, who invents a lie about Him by claiming that He has partners and associates. Note also that the seriousness of a wrong (*ẓulm*) is proportionate to the status of the one who is wronged. Therefore, given that God is greater and more tremendous than any other being, both the wrong done and the wrongdoer are greater than all others.

…and denies the truth when it reaches him? The meaning of *ṣidq* (truth) here is a true message, which is the divine religion brought by the Messenger, as indicated by the qualifier *when it reaches him.*

Is not the abode of the faithless in hell? *Mathwā* is a noun of place, denoting a home or resting-place. The question is rhetorical, signifying the affirmative, namely: Surely hell is the resting-place of those wrongdoers because of their arrogant rejection of the truth, which is tantamount to inventing lies about God, and denying the true message brought to them by the Prophet.

Therefore, based on the context, this verse is specific to the idolaters

who were alive at the time of the Prophet or to the idolaters of his own people, but it also applies generally to whoever introduces an innovation (*bidʿa*) to or forsakes an established teaching (*sunna*) of the religion.

وَالَّذِى جَاءَ بِالصِّدْقِ وَصَدَّقَ بِهِۦٓ أُولَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

(39:33) ***He who brings the truth and he who confirms it: it is they who are the Godwary.***

In this verse, *bringing the truth* refers to bringing the true religion, and *confirming it* refers to believing in it. *He who brings* it is, of course, the Prophet himself.

…is they who are the Godwary: Perhaps the plural pronoun (they) is used here, while the previous two were singular, because this refers to a group of people, namely each and every prophet who brought the true religion and believed in what they brought as well as each and every believer who believed in the true religion and called others to it, as calling others to the truth in word and in deed is part and parcel of following the Prophet, as per the verse: *Say, 'This is my way. I summon to Allah with insight—I and he who follows me'* (12:108).

لَهُمْ مَا يَشَاءُونَ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ جَزَاءُ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(39:34) ***They will have whatever they wish near their Lord. That is the reward of the virtuous,***

This is their reward with their Lord, namely that they shall have whatever they desire. This is because, in paradise, the mere act of wishing something will be a sufficient cause for a person to obtain it, no matter what it is. This is contrary to the life of this world, for obtaining any goal in this life depends upon—in addition to wanting it—multiple factors and causes, including one's own efforts and seeking the help and assistance of others.

Therefore, this verse shows two things: First, that they will dwell in paradise in proximity to the Lord of the Worlds; second, that they shall have whatever they want in there. These two things together are the recompense of the Godwary, the ones who act virtuously in this world, and their virtuousness is the reason for them receiving the aforementioned reward, and this is why the verse says *that is the reward of the virtuous,* as opposed to that is their reward.

The apparent meaning of *iḥsān* (virtue or virtuousness) here is righteous deeds or true belief combined with good deeds. This shows that

the *confirmation* mentioned in the previous verse is to affirm the true religion in word and in deed, as the Qur'an would not refer to someone who forsook any of the ordinances God revealed in it as someone who believed in it or confirmed it.

لِيُكَفِّرَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ أَسْوَأَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا وَيَجْزِيَهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ الَّذِي كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(39:35) ***so that Allah may absolve them of the worst of what they did, and pay them their reward by the best of what they used to do.***

It is self-evident that if God will absolve them of the worst of what they did, He will absolve them of everything less than that as well. The meaning of *the worst of what they did* is acts such as idolatry or the major sins.

In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī writes about this verse: 'In other words, God will spare them the punishment for idolatry and the sins they committed previously because of their faith and virtuousness and their returning to God.' This is a sound interpretation of the verse with regards to it encompassing all bad deeds, and the fact that it predicates this absolution on these sins being in the past and being followed by faith, virtuousness, and repentance. After all, the verse is explaining the effect of confirming the truth that came to them, namely the absolution of their sins as a result of this confirmation and a good reward in the Hereafter.

…and pay them their reward by the best of what they used to do: Some commentators have said this means that God will look at their deeds and grant them a reward that befits their best deeds, such that He will even reward them for their lesser good deeds with the reward of their best deeds. In this reading, the preposition *bi* (by) in *bi aḥsan* (by the best) is used in the sense of exchange, as one might say *biʿtu hādhā bi hādhā* (I will sell you x in exchange for y).

It could also be said that this verse means He will consider their deeds of the highest degree and elevate their degree in paradise accordingly, so that they will not miss out on any aspect of the reward for their highest deeds. However, this reading would not work if we were to apply it to His absolution of their evil deeds.

Other commentators have said that superlative noun forms of *aswaʾ* (worst) and *aḥsan* (best) that appear in this verse are used in the absolute sense, without considering what these deeds are better or worse than, for

all acts of disobedience against God are *worse* and all acts of obedience to Him are *better.*

أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِكَافٍ عَبْدَهُ ۖ وَيُخَوِّفُونَكَ بِالَّذِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِ ۚ وَمَنْ يُضْلِلِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ هَادٍ ﴿٣٦﴾ وَمَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ مُضِلٍّ ۗ أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِعَزِيزٍ ذِي انْتِقَامٍ ﴿٣٧﴾

(39:36-37) ***Does not Allah suffice His servant? They would frighten you of others than Him. Yet whomever Allah leads astray has no guide, and whomever Allah guides, there is no one who can lead him astray. Is not Allah an all-mighty avenger?***

Based on the context, what is meant by *others than Him* here are their deities that they set up as partners besides God. *His servant* here refers to the one praised by God in the previous verses, and, as such, this includes the Prophet first and foremost.

The rhetorical question *Does not Allah suffice…?* is intended to be understood affirmatively, namely that He will suffice him. This also provides a guarantee of safety to the Prophet in response to the threats the idolaters make against invoking their deities, and it also alludes to a promise to suffice him that is made explicit in the verse: *Allah shall suffice you against them, and He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing* (2:137).

Yet whomever Allah leads astray has no guide, and whomever Allah guides, there is no one who can lead him astray: This passage contains two statements whose meanings are reflections of one another, and which enshrine two universal cosmic principles. For this reason, even though the Qur'an could have used the pronoun *He* for God, it opts to mention Him by name.

Following the statement, *Does not Allah suffice…?* the Qur'an says, *Yet whomever Allah leads astray…* to show that those persons making threats against the Prophet will never be guided to true faith, and their efforts will never bear fruit; they will never achieve their ambitions or their goals with regard to the Prophet, for God will never let His Messenger go astray, as He has already guided him.

Is not Allah an all-mighty avenger? Another rhetorical question intended to be read affirmatively, in other words: *Yes, He is.* This is a clear explanation of why *whomever Allah leads astray has no guide,* for His might and His vengefulness decree that He should exact retribution against those who obstinately denied the truth and persisted in disbelief.

Therefore, He leaves them astray and without a guide to guide them, because He is the Almighty whose will cannot be forestalled. And, likewise, if He guides one of His servants because of that servant's Godwariness and virtuousness, none can ever lead him astray.

This explanation also shows that leading astray is attributed to God insofar as God will recompense and punish those who have gone astray, rather than insofar as He causes them to go astray, as we have discussed numerous times previously.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Rawḍat al-Wāʿiẓīn*, al-Fattāl al-Nīshābūrī narrates that the Prophet recited the verse: *Is someone whose breast Allah has opened to Islam so that he is upon a light from his Lord?* and said: 'Indeed the light, when it settles in the heart, expands it and opens it.'

The people asked: 'O Messenger of God! Is there a sign by which this light can be identified?' He said: 'To shun the abode of delusion and turn towards the abode of everlasting life, and to prepare for death before it arrives.'

Author's comments: This is also narrated by al-Suyūṭī in *al-Durr al-manthūr* from Ibn Mardawayh via ʿAbdallāh b. Masʿūd, and from al-Ḥākim al-Tirmidhī via ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar, and from Ibn Jarīr and others from Qatāda.

(2) And in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse, *Is someone whose breast Allah has opened to Islam* (39:22), he says: 'This was revealed about the Commander of the Faithful.'

Author's comments: The fact that this chapter of the Qur'an was revealed all at once is incompatible with this claim.

(3) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī narrates from Ibn Jarīr, from Ibn ʿAbbās, that people said: 'O Messenger of God, if only you spoke to us!' Then the verse was revealed: *Allah has sent down the best of discourses* (39:23).

Author's comments: This narration is an application of the general meaning of the verse to a specific instance (*taṭbīq*).

(4) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, about the verse *whereat quiver the skins of those who fear their Lord* (39:23), al-Ṭabrisī narrates from ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib that the Prophet said: 'When the skin of the servant quivers out of fear of God, his sins fall from him as dead leaves fall from a tree.'

(5) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, concerning *…an Arabic Qur'an, without any deviousness* (39:28), al-Suyūṭī narrates from al-Daylamī in *Musnad al-firdaws*, from Anas, from the Prophet: 'It means uncreated.'

Author's comments: The verse does not allow for the interpretation given in this narration, and we have already discussed the meaning of God's speech (*kalām*) in our commentary on the verse: *These are the apostles, some of whom We gave an advantage over others* (2:353).

(6) In *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, concerning the verse, *…and a man belonging entirely to one man…* (39:23), al-Ṭabrisī narrates al-Ḥākim Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥasakānī via a chain of narrators from ᶜAlī: 'I am that man who belongs entirely to God's Messenger.'

Author's comments: al-ᶜAyyāshī also narrates this via his own chain of narrators from Abū Khālid, from Abū Jaᶜfar [Imām al-Bāqir], and this represents an extension of the verse's meaning (*jarī*), but the example given is universal.

(7) Also in *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, concerning the verse, *Then on the Day of Resurrection you will indeed contend before your Lord* (39:31), it is narrated from Ibn ᶜUmar: 'We believed this verse was about us and about the people of the Evangel and the Torah, so we said, "How shall we contend with one another when we have one prophet and one book?" Then we saw some of us strike others in the face with swords, and then we knew that it had been revealed about us.'

Abū Saᶜīd al-Khudrī said: 'We used to say: "We have one Lord, one prophet, and one religion—so what is this dispute about?" Then, on the Day of Ṣiffīn, some of us fell upon others with swords, and we said: "Yes, this was revealed about us."'

Author's comments: The first tradition is narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr* by various chains from Ibn ᶜUmar, with differences in wording but the same meaning. It is also narrated from a number of compilers of *ḥadīth* compendia (*jawāmiᶜ*) from Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaᶜī. A similar tradition is narrated via two routes from al-Zubayr b. al-ᶜAwwām. The second tradition is narrated from Saᶜīd b. Manṣūr from Abū Saᶜīd al-Khudrī.

These reports flatly contradict narrations to the effect that the Companions are all independent thinkers who are rewarded whether they arrive at the correct conclusions or stray into error.

(8) In *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, about the verse, *He who brings the truth and he who confirms it* (39:33), it is said that the one who brought the

truth is Muḥammad and the one who confirms it is ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, and this is narrated from the Imams of guidance from the Household of the Prophet.

Author's comments: It is also narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, from Ibn Mardawayh, from Abū Hurayra, and it appears that this is an extension of the verse's meaning (*jarī*), based on the verse's coda: *It is they who are the Godwary.*

And some narrate via their chains of narrators that the one who confirmed it was Abū Bakr, and this is also an application of the general meaning of the verse to a specific instance. It is also narrated: 'The one who brought it was the Angel Gabriel, and the one who confirmed it was Muḥammad.' This is also a case of applying a general verse to a specific instance, although in this case the context of the verse precludes such a reading, as this passage is constructed in praise of the Prophet, while the believers and the Angel Gabriel are not under discussion here.

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Verses 38 to 52

This passage of the Qur'an again assails the idolaters with arguments for God's oneness in lordship (*rubūbiyya*) and against Him having any associates and that the intercession they claim for these associates in fact belongs solely to God. These verses also contain admonitions, warnings, and glad tidings related to their call to monotheism.

وَلَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ ۚ قُلْ أَفَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ أَرَادَنِيَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ هَلْ هُنَّ كَاشِفَاتُ ضُرِّهِ أَوْ أَرَادَنِي بِرَحْمَةٍ هَلْ هُنَّ مُمْسِكَاتُ رَحْمَتِهِ ۚ قُلْ حَسْبِيَ اللَّهُ ۖ عَلَيْهِ يَتَوَكَّلُ الْمُتَوَكِّلُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

(39:38) ***If you ask them, 'Who created the heavens and the earth?' they will surely say, 'Allah.' Say, 'Have you considered what you invoke besides Allah? Should Allah desire some distress for me, can they remove the distress visited by Him? Or should He desire some mercy for me, can they withhold His mercy?' Say, 'Allah is sufficient for me. In Him let all the trusters put their trust.'***

This verse presents another argument that builds on a premise that has already been established and agreed upon by both parties, namely that the creator of the cosmos is God. Even the Qur'an's opponents agree that God alone is the Creator, and that He has no partner in this. They only claim that He has partners in the governance of the cosmos, not in its creation.

Now, if creation belongs exclusively to God, then there is no entity in the heavens or the earth and no effect, save that its existence depends upon Him. Therefore, whatever good or ill befalls anything in the cosmos, its existence is from God. No one can withhold any good that God wills or remove any ill that He wills, because this belongs to the realm of creation and origination, and God has no associate in these affairs. Therefore, there is no one who can interfere with Him creating something, prevent Him from creating it, or create it before He does. Now, governing the affairs of the cosmos and arranging them in relation to one another also falls within the scope of creation and origination. Therefore, if God is the creator of all

things, that means He suffices to govern the affairs of the cosmos as well. After all, He is the creator of everything and there is nothing beyond His creation that would lead someone to think that it depended upon someone other than God. So, He is God, the Lord of all things and the Deity of all things—there is no lord other than Him and no god besides Him.

Therefore, when God tells the Prophet, *Say,* '*Have you considered what you invoke besides Allah?*' this builds upon the premise the idolaters have already accepted, namely that God is the creator of everything. Therefore, based on this, ask them about what they worship besides God. Notice that the Qur'an uses the relative pronoun *mā* (what) rather than *man* (whom) to refer to their deities, which includes their idols and lords altogether. This is because their learned elite claimed to worship not the idols but the deities they represented, some of whom they said were the angels or other spirits, while the idols were merely objects of worship and a means of reaching those lords. However, the majority of idol worshippers at the Prophet's time appear to have identified the idols themselves as gods and worshipped them as lords. In conclusion, by using the relative pronoun 'what' this argument includes both groups.

Should Allah desire some distress for me, can they remove the distress visited by Him? Or should He desire some mercy for me, can they withhold His mercy? *Ḍurr* (distress) commonly denotes sickness, hardship, or the like thereof. However, because it is juxtaposed with *raḥma* (mercy), this suggests that it includes every kind of misfortune. This distress and mercy are described as belonging to Him when the Qur'an asks, *can they remove the distress visited by Him?* and *can they withhold His mercy?* to illustrate that the reason they cannot remove this distress or withhold this mercy is because it is His.

Also, the fact that the Prophet speaks about himself in relation to this distress and mercy is part of the argument's rhetorical form, as he is the original person with whom they are disputing, and they threatened him with their deities besides God.

At the same time, the use of the third-person plural feminine pronoun *hunna* (they) to refer to what they invoke besides God is to place the emphasis on the unintelligent aspect of these deities, namely the idols themselves. This supports what we have already said regarding the verse, *Say,* '*Have you considered what you invoke besides Allah?*', namely that the use of the relative pronoun *mā* (what) is to include both the idols and the beings to which they correspond.

Say, 'Allah is sufficient for me…': This is a command to place his trust

in God (*tawakkul*), as also indicated by the following phrase, *'In Him let all the trusting put their trust.'* And this serves as a conclusion to the aforementioned argument, as if the Prophet is being told: 'Say to them: "I have placed my trust in God, because He governs over my life as surely as He created me."' To put this in another format: 'The proof demonstrates His lordship, and I have confirmed this in practice by placing my trust in Him in all my affairs.'

'In Him let all the trusters put their trust': The prepositional phrase *ʿalayhi* (In Him) is placed before *yatawakkal al-mutawakkilūn* (let all the trusting put their trust) to show that this is meant exclusively. In other words: 'Let everyone place their trust in Him and not in anything else.' The subject of the verb (*mutawakkilūn*, 'the trusters') in this sentence is derived from the same root as the verb itself (*yatawakkal*, 'to place one's trust in something'). This shows that what is meant are those who place their trust in something in the most authentic meaning of *tawakkul*. Hence, this passage praises God for being the only one worthy of people placing their trust in Him; the ones who place their trust in God are people of insight and none can blame them for trusting in Him and saying: *Allah is sufficient for me*.

قُلْ يَا قَوْمِ اعْمَلُوا عَلَىٰ مَكَانَتِكُمْ إِنِّي عَامِلٌ ۖ فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾ مَنْ يَأْتِيهِ عَذَابٌ يُخْزِيهِ وَيَحِلُّ عَلَيْهِ عَذَابٌ مُقِيمٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

(39:39-40) ***Say, 'O my people! Act according to your ability. I too am acting. Soon you will know who will be overtaken by a punishment that will disgrace him, and on whom a lasting punishment will descend.'***

Makāna (ability) means a person's station and capacity, and it is to intelligible entities in the same way *makān* (place) is to sensible ones. Therefore, when God commands His Prophet to tell them to act according to their ability, this means that they should remain in their state of disbelief and obstinacy and continue to bar others from the Way of God.

Soon you will know who will be overtaken by a punishment that will disgrace him…: It appears that the [Ar.] word *man* (who) is being used as an interrogative particle here rather than as a relative pronoun, as the verse does not mean they will know each individual person who is overtaken by this punishment, only in general who will be overtaken by it.

…and on whom a lasting punishment will descend: In other words, an

everlasting punishment—as befits the verb *ḥulūl* (descend). The distinction drawn between the two punishments shows that the first refers to the punishment of this world, while the second refers to the punishment of the Hereafter, and this statement is the most severe kind of threat.

Therefore, the meaning of this verse is: 'Speak to the idolaters of your people, and tell them: "O my people, continue to act as you are on the path of disbelief and obstinacy, I too am acting—as I have been commanded by God, and I will not turn aside from this—and soon you will know, who will be overtaken by a punishment that humiliates and abases him—this is the punishment of this world, as happened in the Battle of Badr—and upon whom will descend an everlasting punishment that will never leave him? This is the punishment of the Hereafter."'

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ لِلنَّاسِ بِالْحَقِّ ۖ فَمَنِ اهْتَدَىٰ فَلِنَفْسِهِ ۖ وَمَنْ
ضَلَّ فَإِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهَا ۖ وَمَا أَنْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِوَكِيلٍ ﴿٤١﴾

(39:41) ***Indeed We have sent down the Book to you for mankind with the truth. So whoever is guided is guided for his own sake, and whoever goes astray goes astray to his own detriment, and it is not your duty to watch over them.***

This verse explains the command from the previous one, and the preposition *lām* (for) in *li al-nās* (for mankind) means 'for the sake of mankind, so that you will recite it to them and convey its contents to them.' Meanwhile, the proposition *bāʾ* (with) in *bi al-ḥaqq* (with the truth) signifies accompaniment, meaning that He sent down the Book accompanied by the truth and unsullied by falsehood.

So whoever is guided is guided for his own sake, and whoever goes astray goes astray to his own detriment: Meaning that, since We have sent down the Book with the truth, whoever is guided only benefits himself through obtaining happiness in this world and the reward of the abode of the Hereafter. Conversely, whoever goes astray and is not guided, the misery in this life and consequent punishment in the hereafter are also his alone. God is too exalted and glorified to benefit from any person being guided or harmed by any person going astray.

…and it is not your duty to watch over them: Meaning, you are not responsible for looking after their affairs to ensure that the guidance of the Qur'an will reach their hearts.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is that you should warn them

with what We have said, because We have sent down the Book to you with the truth only in order that you might recite it to mankind. So, whoever of them is guided is only guided for his own benefit and whoever goes astray and is not guided only goes astray to his own detriment. We have not made you responsible for them or for ensuring that guidance enters their hearts, for you have no control over this.

اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنْفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا وَالَّتِي لَمْ تَمُتْ فِي مَنَامِهَا ۖ فَيُمْسِكُ الَّتِي قَضَىٰ عَلَيْهَا الْمَوْتَ وَيُرْسِلُ الْأُخْرَىٰ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

(39:42) ***Allah takes the souls at the time of their death, and those who have not died in their sleep. Then He retains those for whom He has ordained death and releases the others until a specified time. There are indeed signs in that for a people who reflect.***

In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī writes:

> *Tawaffā* (to take) means to receive something completely and in full. One might say: "I have taken my right from so-and-so (*tawaffaytu ḥaqqī min fulān*)" or "I have received it in full (*istawfaytuhu*)."

The subject of the verb (*Allah*) is placed before the verb in this verse in order to signify exclusivity, namely that God alone is the one who takes the souls and no other.

When we read this alongside other verses such as *Say, 'You will be taken away by the angel of death, who has been charged with you…'* (32:11) and *When death approaches anyone of you, Our messengers take him away* (6:61), we perceive that God is the one who truly receives the souls, while the angel of death and the angels who are his assistants are intermediaries who act on His command.

Allah takes the souls at the time of their death…: The term *anfus* (souls, sing. *nafs*) refers to the spirits that are connected to the bodies, not the spirits and the bodies together. This is because the spirits and bodies are not taken together at the time of death; the soul is taken from the body in the sense that its connection with the body is severed such that it no longer is able to interact with or control it. However, *their death* refers to the death of the bodies—whether because we read this as meaning 'at the time of their bodies' death' or as a figure of speech.

… and those who have not died in their sleep: The conjunction *and*

joins this phrase to *souls*; *manām* (sleep) here appears to be a noun of time (*ism zamān*); *fī manāmihā* (in their sleep) is a prepositional phrase connected to *tawaffā*; the meaning of this passage is: 'And He takes those souls who did not die while they were asleep.'

Then God draws a distinction about those souls who die while they are asleep, saying: *Then He retains those for whom He has ordained death and releases the others until a specified time*. This means that He retains the soul for whom He has decreed to die in their sleep in the same manner as He retains the soul that He takes at the time of its death, rather than returning it to its body. As for the other soul—for whom He has not decreed to die—God sends this back to its body until a specified time, whereat its life will end.

The verse makes the *specified time* the duration of the soul's release. This is in order to show that the meaning of *releases* here is that God sends some souls back once more and he sends others back time and again until they reach that *specified time*.

From this verse, we can deduce:

First, that the soul is an entity that is distinct from the body, in the sense that it can be separated from it and exist independently of it while still retaining its own being.

Second, that death and sleep both involve God taking the soul, but they differ in that death means that God takes the soul and does not return it, while sleep means that God takes the soul and might yet return it to its body.

The verse closes with the coda: *There are indeed signs in that for a people who reflect* and, in doing so, they will remember that God is the one who governs their affairs and that they will return to Him so that He can hold them to account for their deeds.

أَمِ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ شُفَعَاءَ ۚ قُلْ أَوَلَوْ كَانُوا لَا يَمْلِكُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

(39:43) *Or have they taken intercessors besides Allah? Say, 'What! Even though they have no control over anything and cannot apply reason?'*

The particle *am* (or) at the beginning of this verse is truncated, with the same meaning as *bal* (rather). Therefore, it means: 'Rather they have taken intercessors besides God, and these are the deities they worship in

order that they intercede for them with God.' Recall, at the beginning of this chapter, we read their claim: *We only worship them so that they may bring us near to Allah* (39:3), and elsewhere we read: *These are our intercessors with Allah* (10:18).

Say, 'What! Even though they have no control over anything and cannot apply reason?' God commands His Prophet to respond to them by disputing their claim, for it is self-evident that intercession depends upon the intercessor having knowledge, namely what is wanted, from whom, and for whom. Therefore, it is meaningless to suggest that an inanimate object can intercede on someone's behalf. Equally, intercession depends upon the intercessor actually having the ability and the right to intercede. Now, there is nothing that anyone besides God possesses save that it belongs to God, and God has permitted them to make use of it. Therefore, while the idolaters claim that their deities can intercede with God on their behalf, their deities do not possess any such power, nor do they have any knowledge to the effect that God has permitted these deities to intercede with Him. It is pure fabrication.

The question *What! Even though…?* is rhetorical and conveys a denial of its proposition. In other words, the passage means: 'Tell them: "Will you take these deities as intercessors even if they do not have control over anything by virtue of their own selves—like the angels—or if they do not even have the power to comprehend anything—like the idols? For this is foolishness!"'

قُلْ لِلَّهِ الشَّفَاعَةُ جَمِيعًا ۖ لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

(39:44) *Say, 'All intercession rests with Allah. To Him belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; then you will be brought back to Him.'*

This reinforces the meaning of the previous verse, *What! Even though they have no control over anything…?*

The *lām* in *lillāh* (translated as 'rests with Allah') signifies ownership, while the sentence *To Him belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth* explains why it is that *All intercession rests with Allah*. In other words, all intercession belongs to God alone, for He is the owner of all things. However, He can permit someone to possess something and thereby endow him with its ownership. As for the idea that some of His servants, such as the angels, could lay claim to intercession without restriction as the idolaters claim, this is impossible. God says: '*There is no intercessor,*

except by His leave' (10:3).

Note that this verse conveys another subtler meaning when we place it besides verses such as *besides Whom they shall have neither any guardian nor any intercessor* (6:51), namely that the true intercessor is God and any other intercessor only has the power to intercede because God has permitted them to do so. As we have mentioned in our discussion on intercession (*shafāʿa*) earlier on in this commentary, intercession is really the mediation of some of His divine attributes between Himself and between the one being interceded for in order to rectify his state, such as the mediation of mercy and forgiveness between Him and between His sinful servant in order to save him from the burden of his sins and release him from punishment.

The difference between this kind of mastery or ownership and the one previously mentioned is that in the previous variety, the property does not share any qualities of the master, meaning that he is not described as an intercessor, as when a person owns a house, for example. On the other hand, in this case the property does share in the qualities of the master, and he is considered its intercessor. For example, imagine that Zayd becomes brave because his master is brave.

… then you will be brought back to Him: This sentence provides another rationale for the fact that God alone is the rightful possessor of all intercession. This is because someone only has the power of intercession when the one receiving intercession is completely dependent upon him; if he wishes, he can accept the intercession and set right the affairs of the recipient. However, no one else has the power of intercession unless He grants it to them and permits them to exercise it. God, after all, is the one to whom all the servants must return, and not those whom they invoke besides Him. God is the master of all intercession and, therefore, their claim that their deities will intercede for them unconditionally and their worship of these deities based on this are completely without foundation.

Some have said *then you will be brought back to Him* is intended as a threat against them, as if to say: 'Then you will be brought back to Him, whereat you will realize that they are not going to intercede for you, and all of your efforts to worship them have come to naught.'

Others have said that it could be intended as an explicit statement that God is the master of the Hereafter, which is where intercession is most beneficial, and a reminder that while others besides God may believe themselves to have some mastery or ownership of their own, there will come a day when everything will be cut off besides God. However, the

correct reading of the verse is the one we have already presented above.

وَإِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ اشْمَأَزَّتْ قُلُوبُ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ ۖ وَإِذَا ذُكِرَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِذَا هُمْ يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(39:45) ***When Allah is mentioned alone, the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter shrink away, but when others are mentioned besides Him, behold, they rejoice!***

The meaning of God being mentioned alone is that He is invoked without their gods. An example of this is the phrase *lā ilāha ill Allāh* (there is no god but God). To *shrink away* means to withdraw from and be averse to something.

This verse singles out their lack of belief in the Hereafter for mention because this is the root of their aversion. If they believed in the Hereafter and that they were going to return to God and that He was going to recompense them for their deeds, they would have served Him alone rather than their false gods and they would not have been averse to invoking Him alone.

…but when others are mentioned besides Him, behold, they rejoice! The phrase *others… besides Him* refers to their deities, and *istibshār* (to rejoice) means to be so happy in one's heart that its traces are visible on one's face.

قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ فَاطِرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ عَالِمَ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ أَنْتَ تَحْكُمُ بَيْنَ عِبَادِكَ فِي مَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

(39:46) ***Say, 'O Allah! Originator of the heavens and the earth, Knower of the sensible and the Unseen, You will judge between Your servants concerning that about which they used to differ.'***

This verse shows that the debate with the idolaters has reached the point where there is no hope of any good coming from them, because they have forgotten about the Hereafter and deny that they will ever return to God. This is to the extent that they were averse to even hearing the name of God alone being invoked. Therefore, God commands His Prophet to invoke Him alone and to remind them of the fact that He will judge between His servants concerning those things they differ about. This invocation takes the form of taking recourse to God while also affirming

the Resurrection. It describes God as the Originator of the heavens and the earth—meaning the one who brought them forth from the obscurity of non-existence and into the light of existence—and the Knower of the visible and the unseen, for whom nothing is hidden. The logical corollary of this is that He will judge by the truth and that His verdict will be carried out.

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وَلَوْ أَنَّ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا وَمِثْلَهُ مَعَهُ لَافْتَدَوْا بِهِ مِنْ سُوءِ الْعَذَابِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ۚ وَبَدَا لَهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَمْ يَكُونُوا يَحْتَسِبُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

(39:47) ***Even if the wrongdoers possessed all that is on the earth, and as much of it besides, they would surely offer it to redeem themselves with it from a terrible punishment on the Day of Resurrection, and there will appear to them from Allah what they had never reckoned.***

The phrase *alladhīna ẓalamū* (the wrongdoers) refers to those who do wrong in this world, as the verb is used here adjectivally. *These wrongdoers* are those who deny the Hereafter, as God says: *May Allah's curse be on the wrongdoers! Those who bar from the way of Allah, and seek to make it crooked, and disbelieve in the Hereafter* (7:44–45).

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Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'If those who deny the Hereafter had all the wealth and treasure that the earth contains and more, they would have offered it as a ransom to escape the terrible punishment that awaits them.'

…and there will appear* (badāʾ) *to them from Allah what they had never reckoned: *Badāʾ* (to appear) means for something to come into sight, while *iḥtisāb* (to reckon) means to count on something in the sense of making plans based on it. Some have said that the term *iḥtisāb* and its cognate *ḥisāb* are both frequently used in the sense of *ẓann* (to think), as in the phrase 'what they had never reckoned' [*mā lam yakūnū yaḥtasibūn*], meaning 'what they never thought would happen.' However, according to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, the difference between *ḥisāb* and *ẓann* is to adopt one of two contrary propositions without considering the other, even while there is an equal possibility of either proposition coming to pass. On the other hand, while *ẓann* is similar in meaning, it means that the person has considered both propositions but deemed one to be more likely than the other.

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Based on the context of the verse, this passage means that, on the Day

of Resurrection, the deniers will confront things that are far beyond what they expected and far more terrible and frightening than they had imagined. It does not mean they will witness things that they did not believe in or were not convinced about. For example, they will have heard that God has a scale that He will set up to weigh their deeds, that He will judge between them, and that there is a hell containing all manner of punishments. However, when they heard these things, they compared them—while denying them—to the things they were accustomed to in this world. This means that when they do come face-to-face with the realities of the Day of Judgment, they will find them far greater and more terrible than what they had previously conceived. Therefore, this verse on the description of the punishment that awaits the wrongdoers is similar to the verse that describes the blessings that await the inhabitants of Paradise: *No one knows what has been kept hidden for them of comfort as a reward for what they used to do* (32:17).

The context also indicates that when the verse says things *will appear to them*, this is in the sense of these things becoming visible and being revealed after being previously kept hidden, as alluded to by the verse *You were certainly oblivious of this. We have removed your veil from you, and so your sight is acute today* (50:22).

وَبَدَا لَهُمْ سَيِّئَاتُ مَا كَسَبُوا وَحَاقَ بِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِئُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(39:48) ***The evils of what they had earned will appear to them, and they will be besieged by what they used to deride.***

In other words, their evil deeds will appear to them after being hidden from them. This is akin to the verse *The day when every soul will find present whatever good it has done; and as to whatever evil it has done* (3:30).

…and they will be besieged by what they used to deride: Meaning, they will be surrounded and afflicted by the things they used to mock when they heard them from the upholders of religion in this world, such as the hardships and terrors of the Day of Judgment and the different kinds of punishment it contains.

فَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ ضُرٌّ دَعَانَا ثُمَّ إِذَا خَوَّلْنَاهُ نِعْمَةً مِنَّا قَالَ إِنَّمَا أُوتِيتُهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ ۚ بَلْ هِيَ فِتْنَةٌ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(39:49) ***When distress befalls man, he supplicates Us. Then, when We grant him a blessing from Us, he says, 'I was given it by virtue***

of knowledge.' Rather it is a test, but most of them do not know.

This verse offers a rationale for the reason for the wrongdoers' condition in the previous verse. That is why it begins with the particle *fā*ʾ, which signifies that it follows on from the previous verse and explains it.

In the previous verses, God portrayed the disbelievers as turning aside from every sign that might guide them to the truth, closing their ears to the proofs presented to them, disregarding admonitions, refusing to reflect, denying His lordship, and rejecting the Resurrection and Final Judgment. This was to the point that their hearts recoiled at the mention of God alone.

In the present verse, He explains that this stems from the human being's inclination to follow the whims of his low self (*nafs*) and be misled by the decorous-seeming pleasures of this world and the apparent causes of things that surround him. Therefore, the human being tends to forget until he is afflicted by some distress, whereat he turns to his Lord devotedly and invokes Him. Then, when his Lord bestows some blessings upon him, he credits this to his own knowledge and expertise while forgetting his Lord, ignorant of the fact that this was a trial through which he was being tested.

When distress befalls man—some illness or hardship—*he supplicates Us*—he directs his prayers only to Us and turns away from all others.

Then, when We grant him a blessing from Us, he says, 'I was given it by virtue of knowledge': *Takhwīl* (to grant) meant to give something as a gift, and the word *blessing* is qualified by *from Us* to show that this blessing appears as an actual blessing to the person receiving it, as opposed to being a blessing that they cannot perceive directly.

The pronoun 'it' (*hu*) in 'I was given it' (*ūtītuhu*) refers to the blessing, even though the pronoun (*hu*) is masculine and its referent (*niʿma*) is feminine insofar as it takes the form of a thing (*shayʾ*) or wealth (*māl*). This is also to show that the speaker does not acknowledge it as a blessing from God, but rather detaches it from Him and calls it something else. He does not refer to it as a blessing as that would entail him acknowledging its Bestower, which he also avoids doing by adopting the passive voice in *I was given it*. In other words, he omits the agent of the verb *given*. The contrast between *a blessing from Us* and *I was given it* is an example of the Qur'an's sublime eloquence. Some commentators have offered alternative explanations of the use of the pronoun *hu* in *I was given it*, but these are generally without basis, and interested readers can refer to other works of commentary for these discussions.

The context of the verse indicates that the phrase *ʿalā ʿilm* (by virtue of knowledge) should be understood as meaning 'by virtue of my knowledge.' In other words, I was given what I was given because of my own knowledge and cleverness regarding the ways of earning a living and amassing wealth.

Some have said it means: 'I was given it by virtue of God's knowledge of my own goodness, which made me worthy of being granted such a blessing.' Others have said it means: '…by virtue of my knowledge that God is pleased with me.' However, the reader will see that the wording of the passage *Then, when We grant him a blessing from Us, he says, 'I was given it by virtue of knowledge'* does not admit either of these readings.

Rather it is a test, but most of them do not know: In other words, the blessing that God has granted is actually a test (*fitna*) or trial from God for the recipient, but most people do not know this.

Some have said it means that this blessing is actually a punishment for them. Others have said it means that this statement is a tribulation for them, as it means they will be punished. However, both of these readings are far-fetched, especially the latter.

قَدْ قَالَهَا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَمَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

(39:50) *Those who were before them said that, but what they used to earn did not avail them.*

The demonstrative pronoun *that* in *said that* refers to the previous utterance.

This verse refutes their claim '*I was given it by virtue of knowledge*' because it is a trial by which they are being tested; in other words, if they were given it because of their own cleverness or because they had earned it through their own strength and efforts, then their own cleverness and efforts would suffice them and they would never suffer any misfortunes or losses as a result. Instead, they would retain these blessings and enjoy them, and they would never perish. Of course, this was not what happened to those who came before them and made exactly the same claim. What they used to earn did not avail them and they were stricken by the evil that they used to earn.

It appears that the phrase *Those who were before them said that* is a reference to Korah and others like him, as the Qur'an quotes him as saying *'I have indeed been given this because of the knowledge that I have'* (28:79).

فَأَصَابَهُمْ سَيِّئَاتُ مَا كَسَبُوا ۚ وَالَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْ هَٰؤُلَاءِ سَيُصِيبُهُمْ سَيِّئَاتُ مَا كَسَبُوا وَمَا هُمْ بِمُعْجِزِينَ ﴿٥١﴾

(39:51) ***So the evils of what they had earned visited them, and as for the wrongdoers among these, the evils of what they earn shall be visited on them and they will not thwart [Allah's might].***

The demonstrative pronoun *these* in *the wrongdoers among these* refers to the Prophet's people, meaning: 'the path of those who act wrongly from among your people shall be the same as those who came before them; they will suffer the evils of what they earned and the consequences of their deeds, and they will not thwart God in the least.'

أَوَلَمْ يَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

(39:52) ***Do they not know that Allah expands the provision for whomever He wishes and tightens it? There are indeed signs in that for a people who have faith.***

This is another response to the claim '*I was given it by virtue of knowledge*' (39:49); the first response was *Those who were before them said that* (39:50). However, while the first response refuted their claim by exposing its logical invalidity, this verse refutes it through establishing the countervailing argument that God alone expands and tightens people's provision.

To explain further: The mere fact that a person strives to obtain provision on the basis of his own knowledge and volition does not in of itself constitute a sufficient cause for them to obtain their provision, or else no one would fail to obtain provision. However, in reality this is plainly not the case, for how many seekers of provision return empty-handed and despondent.

So, there are innumerable causes and conditions in terms of both time and place, along with a variety of potential impediments dependent on external circumstances, whose convergence determines whether a person is able to obtain provision through their efforts or not.

However, the convergence of these causes and conditions—in spite of their manifold variety (including being in the right place at the right time with all the necessary material requirements present) and the innumerable prerequisites that they depend upon—should not be seen as coincidental.

After all, what is coincidental neither happens consistently or often. On the contrary, the law that governs the provision of those seeking provision encompasses all living beings. In fact, it covers the furthest reaches of the visible world, and it can be clearly seen in the universal order of the cosmos, for were this law to be suspended for even a moment, everything would perish.

Now, this order that governs the cosmos, by virtue of its unity and the harmony of its constituent parts, points to the unity of its originator and the singularity of its director and sustainer, who must be outside the constituent parts of the world that this order maintains. And this originator is none other than God.

Furthermore, since this system is part of the divine governance of the cosmos, and the governance of the cosmos is an extension of its creation—as we have already mentioned on numerous occasions—then the creator of the cosmos is also its governor, and the governor of the cosmos is its provider, and that provider is God.

The verse highlights this argument with the phrase *for whomever He wishes*, as if the expansion and contraction of provision (*rizq*) is dependent upon God's will, then it is not dependent upon the will of the human being. It is obvious that the human being cannot produce, by virtue of his own knowledge, effort, or will, any of the necessary means or causes for his own provision. Neither is provision a matter of chance or coincidence. On the contrary, it is governed by the cosmic order that follows the will of its creator and sustainer, which is God Almighty.

We have already discussed the meaning of *rizq* (provision, sustenance) in our commentary on the verse *and You provide for whomever You wish without any reckoning* (3:27), and we will elaborate further in our discussion of the verse *By the Lord of the sky and the earth, it is indeed the truth, just as you speak* (51:23).

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Tawḥīd*, al-Ṣadūq narrates in a tradition that a man asked ʿAlī about verses whose meaning was not clear to him, to which he said:

As for the verse *You will be taken away by the angel of death, who has been charged with you* (32:11), and the verse *Allah takes the souls at the time of their death* (39:42), and the verse *Our messengers take him away and they do not neglect* (6:61), and the verse *Those whom the angels take away while they are wronging*

themselves (16:28), and the verse *those whom the angels take away while they are pure* (16:32), God governs the matter however He pleases and charges whoever He wishes of His creatures with whatever mission He wishes. As for the angel of death, God has charged him specifically with whoever He wills of His creatures, and He has charged His messenger angels specifically with whoever He wishes.

The possessor of knowledge cannot always explain all of his knowledge to all people, for some of them are more capable of receiving it, while others are less so, and there is some knowledge that can be borne by anyone and some knowledge that cannot be borne unless God makes it possible for a person to do so and grants him assistance, and this is reserved for His *awliyāʾ*.

It will suffice you to know only that God is the giver of life and the bringer of death and that He receives people's souls in the hands of whomsoever He wishes of His creatures, whether angels or others.

(2) In *al-Khiṣāl*, al-Ṣadūq also narrates from ʿAlī in a tradition on the number four-hundred: 'No Muslim sleeps while in a state of ritual impurity (*junub*), nor does he sleep except in a state of ritual purity (*ṭahūr*). And if he does not find water, then let him purify himself with dust (*tayammum bi al-ṣaʿīd*). For the spirit of the believer ascends to God, who receives it and blesses it, and if it has reached its appointed time, then He places it in the treasury of His mercy. And if it has not reached its appointed time then He sends it with His trusted angels who return it to its body.'

(3) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī narrates from al-ʿAyyāshī via his chain of narrators, from al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb, from ʿAmr b. Thābit, from Abū al-Miqdām, from his father, from Imam al-Bāqir: 'No one sleeps save that their soul ascends to the heavens while his spirit remains in his body, and there extends between them a rope that is like the ray of the sun. If God permits that the spirit be taken, then the spirit responds to the call of the soul and ascends; and if God permits that the spirit should return to the world, then the soul responds to the call of the spirit and descends. This is God's saying *Allah takes the souls at the time of their death* (39:42). So, whatever visions the soul sees in the dominions of the heavens are meaningful, but whatever it sees while it is between the heavens and the earth are the illusions of

Satan, and they have no meaning.'

(4) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī narrates from Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn Mardawayh from Salīm b. ʿĀmir that ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb said: 'Dreams are strange indeed. One man falls asleep and sees things which had never occurred to him before. His dream is like being taken by the hand. Another man has a dream and it is meaningless.'

Then ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib said to him: 'Shall I not inform you of the reason for this, O Commander of the Faithful? God says *Allah takes the souls at the time of their death, and those who have not died in their sleep. Then He retains those for whom He has ordained death and releases the others until a specified time* (39:42). So, it is God who takes all of the souls, and whatever these souls behold while they are with Him in the heavens are true dreams. However, what they see when He returns them to their bodies are naught but the insinuations of the devils in their air; they lie and tell them falsehoods.' Whereat ʿUmar was astounded by what ʿAlī had said.

Author's comments: We have already discussed the significance of dreams and visions at length in our commentary on Sūrah Yūsuf, and referring back to this will assist the reader in understanding the meaning of these traditions. Note that these traditions use the term 'heavens' (*samāʾ*) to denote what is commonly called 'the superior realm of images' (*ʿālam al-mithāl al-akbar*), while they use 'what is between the heavens and the earth' (*mā bayn al-samāʾ wa al-arḍ*) to denote what is commonly called 'the inferior realm of images' (*ʿālam al-mithāl al-aṣghar*).

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Verses 53 to 61

These verses command the Prophet to call his people to submit to God and follow what He has sent down. At the same time, it tells him to warn them of the grief and regret that await them on a day when neither grief nor regret will avail them if they continue to commit excesses toward their own souls and to arrogantly reject the truth while in this world. The hellfire and loss that awaits the disbelievers is contrasted with the success and salvation that awaits the Godwary. However, the overall tone of these verses is manifestly gentle and merciful.

قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِنْ رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٥٣﴾

(39:53) ***Say 'O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed Allah will forgive all sins. Indeed He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful.'***

Here, God enjoins His Messenger to summon his people on His behalf. God's use of the expression *O My servants* to address His audience does two things: (1) It calls to mind the arguments He has already used to call them to worship Him and (2) it encourages them to respond to this summons. It reminds them of these arguments because it shows that they are His servants and He is their master, and it is the right of the master that his servants should obey his commands and serve him. Therefore, God, as their master, has the right to summon them to worship and obey Him. As for encouraging them to respond to this summons, the fact that He describes them as His servants using the first-person singular pronoun *My* suggests kindness and concern, which encourages them to take hold of His mercy and forgiveness.

Who have committed excesses against their own souls: According to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *iṣrāf* (to commit excess) means to exceed the proper bounds in any action that the human being performs, although it is most commonly used to denote immoderation in the spending of wealth. Furthermore, the verb *iṣrāf* can also suggest an offence or something approaching one, which is why it is made transitive here using the preposition *ʿalā* (against). Based on the context of the verse, to commit

excess against one's soul means to commit an offence against it by polluting it with sins, whether idolatry or any other of the major or minor sins.

A number of commentators have argued that *My servants* refers to the ones who believe, because this is usually how God refers to them in the Qur'an. Hence, the phrase *O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls* actually means: 'O believers who have committed sins…'

However, this is refuted by the fact that the phrase *O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls* and the seven verses that follow it all share a single context (*siyāq*), which is calling the Prophet's people to worship God. Moreover, the fact that this section of verses ends with the passage *Yes, My signs certainly came to you, but you denied them and acted arrogantly and you were among the faithless* (39:59) shows that these verses explicitly include the idolaters amongst God's servants, as it certainly cannot be a reference to the faithful.

As for the claim that God uses the expression *My servants* to refer exclusively to the faithful, each and every one of the ten or so occasions that it appears in the Qur'an with this meaning is accompanied by a contextual indicator (*qarīna*) that demonstrates this fact. Therefore, it cannot be taken to denote only the faithful when it appears without further qualification, especially given that there are cases where it is used in an unqualified sense and it includes both the faithful and the idolaters.

To conclude, there can be no doubt that the phrase *My servants* in this verse includes the idolaters. In fact, the position that, based on the context of the verses, it specifically refers to the idolaters—an opinion that has been attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās—is more plausible than the claim that it refers exclusively to the faithful.

…do not despair of the mercy of Allah: *Qunūṭ* (despair) means to give up hope; and because this statement is addressed to the sinners with the intent of summoning them towards God, the meaning of *raḥma* (mercy) here is the divine mercy that pertains specifically to the Hereafter rather than the more universal kind, which encompasses both this world and the Hereafter. And, obviously, the kind of mercy that the sinners will need with urgency in the Hereafter is forgiveness (*maghfira*). Therefore, the meaning of God's mercy in this verse is His forgiveness, which is why the next sentence gives the rationale behind this prohibition on losing hope as *Indeed Allah will forgive all sins*.

Notice that there is a shift (*iltifāt*) from the first-person to the third-person in the verse when it says *Indeed Allah will forgive all sins*. God does

not say, 'I will forgive all sins.' This is to illustrate that God is the one with the Most Beautiful Names, and among these names are *al-Ghafūr* (All-forgiving) and *al-Raḥīm* (Most merciful). It is as if He means to say: 'Do not despair of my mercy, for I am surely the God who forgives all sins, for God is the All-forgiving, the Most merciful.'

Indeed Allah will forgive all sins: This explains why God tells His servants not to despair of His mercy, because all of their sins can be forgiven. However, while forgiveness is universal, it is by no means haphazard; forgiveness requires a specified cause to bring it about. The Qur'an identifies two potential causes for forgiveness. One is intercession (*shafāʿa*)[1] and the other is repentance (*tawba*). Now, when God says He *will forgive all sins*, this cannot be referring to intercession because intercession does not encompass idolatry (*shirk*), as explicitly stated by numerous verses of the Qur'an. For example, we have already discussed how the verse, *Indeed Allah does not forgive that any partner should be ascribed to Him, but He forgives anything besides that to whomever He wishes* (4:48), pertains to intercession. On the other hand, *Indeed Allah will forgive all sins* includes idolatry and all other sins too.

Therefore, the only remaining possibility is that this verse is referring to the forgiveness of sins resulting from repentance. In it, God explicitly states that He can forgive all sins, even idolatry, through repentance.

As we have already established, these seven verses are all part of the same passage and share a single context. Taken together, they forbid God's servants from despair—as a prelude to what follows—and bid them to repent for their sins, submit to God, and do righteous deeds. The first verse is not separate from those that follow it, and therefore it cannot be imagined that there are no conditions or prerequisites for this forgiveness, whether repentance or anything else.

There has been considerable debate amongst commentators about the sentence *Indeed Allah will forgive all sins*. Some have argued that this forgiveness does not extend to idolatry or any of the other major sins for which God has ordained the punishment of hellfire without qualifying this with the possibility of forgiveness. Therefore, according to this view, the forgiveness promised here extends only to minor sins.

Others have argued that God's forgiveness is universal and does not require repentance or any other cause in order to be obtained. However,

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1 We have already discussed intercession in the first volume of the commentary. (Auth.)

they also exclude idolatry from it, because of the verse *Indeed Allah does not forgive that any partner should be ascribed to Him, but He forgives anything besides that to whomever He wishes* (4:48). On this basis, they conclude that forgiveness is universal, even if there is no specific reason for one sinner to be forgiven over another, such as intercession or repentance. This is a haphazard sort of forgiveness (*maghfira juzāfiyya*), and the arguments they offer for it are baseless.[1]

However, it is obvious that the verse encompasses both idolatry and all other sins. Furthermore, it is clear from the Qur'an that idolatry can only be forgiven by virtue of repentance. Therefore, the universality of forgiveness offered by this verse is qualified by the need for repentance, and there is no escaping this.

وَأَنِيبُوا إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ وَأَسْلِمُوا لَهُ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمُ الْعَذَابُ ثُمَّ لَا تُنْصَرُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾

(39:54) ***And turn penitently to your Lord and submit to Him before the punishment overtakes you, whereupon you will not be helped.***

The particle *and* means that this verse follows from the command *do not despair* in the previous one. *Ināba* (to turn penitently to God) means to return to Him, which is the act of *tawba* (repentance). Note that the verse says *turn penitently to your Lord* instead of 'turn penitently to Him' to illustrate the rationale for this command, as it is God's lordship (*rubūbiyya*) that makes Him worthy of worship (*ʿibāda*).

The meaning of *submit to Him* is to act in accordance with His will. The verse says *submit to Him* instead of 'believe in Him' because the verses before and after this speak about their arrogance (*istikbār*) towards the truth, which is the opposite of submission to it.

…before the punishment overtakes you, whereupon you will not be

1 For example, al-Ālūsī in *Rūḥ al-maʿānī* has presented seventeen different arguments to the effect that the verse does not predicate forgiveness upon repentance, but none of these are particularly strong. The idea that forgiveness can be bestowed haphazardly without the sinner needing to do anything to receive it, such as repenting for their sins, runs contrary to the principle of God's wisdom. Then, al-Ālūsī qualifies the verse with the implicit clause 'for whomever He wishes' (*li man yashāʾ*) because it appears in some obscure recitations (*qirāʾāt*). If the reader wishes to know more about this, they can refer to his commentary for further information. (Trans.)

helped: This sentence is joined to the commands to *turn penitently* and *submit*. Based on the content of the following verses, the meaning of *the punishment* here appears to be the punishment of the Hereafter rather than a worldly punishment. However, it is possible that it could refer to divine punishment in general, as whenever this descends (whether in this world or the next) repentance is no longer accepted, and this would include the divine punishment of being destroyed like previous nations, as per the verse *But their faith was of no benefit to them when they sighted Our punishment—Allah's precedent which has passed among His servants* (40:85).

…*whereupon you will not be helped* means that forgiveness will not reach you in any way, shape, or form because of the absence of its cause, which in this case would be repentance, because intercession would not encompass their idolatry.

وَاتَّبِعُوا أَحْسَنَ مَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمُ الْعَذَابُ بَغْتَةً وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

(39:55) ***And follow the best of what has been sent down to you from your Lord, before the punishment overtakes you suddenly while you are unaware.***

Like the previous verses, this is addressed to everyone, whether they are believers or disbelievers, as the Qur'an was originally sent down for both groups.

This verse commands the audience to follow the best of what God has sent down. Some have said this means to follow the rules governing the permitted and the prohibited (*al-ḥalāl wa al-ḥarām*) rather than the stories (*qaṣaṣ*). Others have said it means to obey the Qur'an's commands and prohibitions by doing what is obligatory (*wājib*) and recommended (*mustaḥabb*) while avoiding that which is forbidden (*ḥarām*) or disliked (*makrūh*) but not avoiding the permitted (*mubāḥ*). Still others have said it means observing the major rules (*ʿazāʾim*), which are the obligatory and forbidden acts. And some have said *what has been sent down* refers to divine scripture in general, and *the best* of this category is the Qur'an. Therefore, *follow the best of what has been sent down* means 'follow the Qur'an.'

In fairness, the phrase *and submit to Him* in the previous verse already encompasses all of these opinions. Therefore, the idea that *follow the best of what has been sent down* refers to any of them seems like an unnecessary

repetition on the part of the Author.

Perhaps what is meant instead by *the best of what has been sent down* is those passages of the Qur'an that indicate how to best observe God's right of servanthood by obeying His ordinances in both belief and practice. This is akin to those passages in which God summons people to be continuously mindful of Him, to love Him, to be wary of Him as befits Him, and to dedicate their faith exclusively to Him. This is because by following the commandments in these passages, the human being will be granted a good life, in which the spirit of faith will enter his heart, in which his behavior will be set right, and, as a result, he will be under God's guardianship (*wilāya*). And this is a dignity unmatched by any other.

This is the most appropriate reading of *before the punishment overtakes you, whereupon you will not be helped*, as it is a call to take action while there is still time and before they are deprived of the opportunity to do so. This indicates that the person being called to action is procrastinating and reassuring himself that he still has time to do what is needed. This reading emphasizes the importance of setting oneself right inwardly so that one can set oneself right outwardly and take concrete actions. As such, this passage is alike in its meaning to the verse *O you who have faith! Answer Allah and the Apostle when he summons you to that which will give you life. Know that Allah intervenes between a man and his heart* (8:24).

أَنْ تَقُولَ نَفْسٌ يَا حَسْرَتَىٰ عَلَىٰ مَا فَرَّطْتُ فِي جَنْبِ اللَّهِ وَإِنْ كُنْتُ لَمِنَ السَّاخِرِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

(39:56) ***Lest any soul should say, 'Alas for my negligence in the vicinage of Allah! Indeed I was among those who ridiculed.'***

Al-Ṭabrisī writes in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*:

> '*Tafrīṭ* (negligence) means to ignore that which should be given priority until its time runs out.'

He also says:

> '*Taḥassur* (regret) means to be grieved by something whose time has run out and can no longer be obtained.'

Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī writes:

> '*Janb* (vicinity) means one's flank… but then the Arabs used it to refer to the side adjacent to the limb, because it was their habit to do that with all of the body's extremities, such as *yamīn* (right) and *shimāl* (left).'

Based on this, *janb Allāh* (the vicinage of God) means His side or vicinity, and this refers to all of the obligations whose performance the servant owes to Him, for example to worship Him alone and not to disobey Him. Therefore, to be negligent of God's vicinage means to fall short in fulfilling one's duties to Him.

'…Indeed I was among those who ridiculed': The particle *in* (indeed) in this passage is the softened version of *inna*, while *sākhirīn* (those who ridiculed) is the active participle of *sakhar*, which means to mock or deride.

Therefore, the overall meaning of the verse is: 'We only address these words to you so that one of you will not say in future: "Woe to me for falling short in my duties towards God, surely I was one of those who mocked."' Of course, the context in which they will say these words is the Day of Judgment.

أَوْ تَقُولَ لَوْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ هَدَانِي لَكُنْتُ مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٥٧﴾

(39:57) ***Or say, 'Had Allah guided me I would have surely been among the Godwary!'***

The verb *taqūl* (say) is feminine because its subject is the *nafs* (soul) in the previous verse, and the meaning of guidance here is to be shown the right path. The verse's meaning is obvious, and it is presented here to foreclose any possibility of making such an excuse on the Day of Resurrection.

أَوْ تَقُولَ حِينَ تَرَى الْعَذَابَ لَوْ أَنَّ لِي كَرَّةً فَأَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

(39:58) ***Or say, when it sights the punishment, 'If only there had been a second chance for me I would be among the virtuous!'***

The particle *law* (if only) signifies a wish, and *karra* (a second chance) literally means 'a return.' The meaning of the verse is: 'Or for the soul to say when it sees the punishment that awaits it on the Day of Judgment: "I wish I could go back to the world and be one of the virtuous!"'

بَلَىٰ قَدْ جَاءَتْكَ آيَاتِي فَكَذَّبْتَ بِهَا وَاسْتَكْبَرْتَ وَكُنْتَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٥٩﴾

(39:59) ***Yes, My signs certainly came to you, but you denied them and acted arrogantly and you were among the faithless.***

This is a response and a rebuke to the second of the soul's laments—namely, *Had Allah guided me I would have surely been among the Godwary!*—and it is delivered on the Day of Judgment as well, as indicated

by its context.

Notice that between the soul's second lament, *Had Allah guided me…*, and this response is the third lament, *If only there had been a second chance…* However, God only responds to the second one.

The reason for this is that the three laments appear in the order that they will issue from the guilty ones on the Day of Judgment. So, when the Day of Judgment sets in and the wrongdoers see that it is the day they will be recompensed for their deeds, in which they have been negligent and for which the time has now run out, they will be gripped by regret and remorse for this, and say: *'Alas for my negligence in the vicinage of Allah! Indeed I was among those who ridiculed.'* God says elsewhere *When the Hour overtakes them suddenly, they will say, 'Alas for us, for what we neglected in it!'* (6:31).

Then, they will be held to account for their deeds and the Godwary will be sent to paradise, while the wrongdoers will be told *And 'Get apart today, you guilty ones!'* (36:59), whereat they will lament: *'Had Allah guided me I would have surely been among the Godwary!'*

Finally, when they are sent into the fires of Hell, first they will sight them and then they will enter them, whereat they will wish they could return to this world and act virtuously to escape this fate and be felicitous: *Or say, when it sights the punishment, 'If only there had been a second chance!'* God says: *Were you to see when they are brought to a halt by the Fire, whereupon they will say, 'If only we were sent back! Then we will not deny the signs of our Lord, and we will be among the faithful!'* (6:27). He also portrays them as saying: '*Our Lord! Bring us out of this! Then, if we revert, we will indeed be wrongdoers*' (23:107).

Then, having related what the guilty will say on the Day of Judgment as they progress through its stages, God responds to them. Now, if God had rearranged the verses so that the original statement and the response occurred one after the other, whether by bringing the statement later or placing the response earlier, it would not have emphasized that He had singled out *Had Allah guided me* for a response, while not offering an answer to the first and third laments. This is because in the first they confess to mocking the truth, while in the third they wish for the chance to return to this world. However, God will rebuke them on the Day of Judgment, prevent them from speaking, and not answer their pleas—a fact to which He alludes in the verses, *They will say, 'Our Lord! Our wretchedness overcame us, and we were an astray lot. Our Lord! Bring us out of this! Then, if we revert, we will indeed be wrongdoers.' He will say, 'Begone*

in it, and do not speak to Me! Indeed there was a part of My servants who would say, 'Our Lord! We have believed. So forgive us, and have mercy on us, and You are the best of the merciful.' But then you took them by ridicule until they made you forget My remembrance, and you used to laugh at them. Indeed I have rewarded them today for their patience. They are indeed the triumphant' (23:106–111).

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وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ تَرَى الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ وُجُوهُهُمْ مُسْوَدَّةٌ ۚ أَلَيْسَ فِي جَهَنَّمَ مَثْوًى لِلْمُتَكَبِّرِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾

(39:60) ***On the Day of Resurrection you will see those who attributed lies to Allah with their faces gloomy. Is not the abode of the arrogant in hell?***

The lies they attributed to God were the fact that He has a partner or that He has a son. This category also includes innovations in religion (*bidʿa*).

To have gloomy faces means to be humiliated, which is a recompense for their arrogance in this world, which is why God asks *Is not the abode of the arrogant in hell?*

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وَيُنَجِّي اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا بِمَفَازَتِهِمْ لَا يَمَسُّهُمُ السُّوءُ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

(39:61) ***Allah will deliver those who were Godwary with their triumph. No ill shall touch them, nor will they grieve.***

The term *mafāza* (triumph) appears to be an m-infinitive (*maṣdar mīmī*) signifying success, which means to obtain one's goal. The preposition *bāʾ* in *bi mafāzatihim* (with their success) either signifies accompaniment (*malābisa*) or causation (*sababiyya*), with the latter meaning that the success God decrees for them now is the cause of their deliverance.

No ill shall touch them—explains what is meant by their deliverance. In other words, He will deliver them such that no harm will come to them from outside, nor will they grieve in themselves.

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Notice that this verse is akin in meaning to the latter most of the verses quoted from Sūrah al-Muʾminūn above: *Indeed I have rewarded them today for their patience. They are indeed the triumphant* (23:111).

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī narrates from the Commander

of the Faithful: 'There is no verse in the Qur'an that is broader in scope than *O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls…* (39:53).'

Author's comments: It is also narrated by al-Suyūṭī in *al-Durr al-manthūr* from Ibn Jarīr, from Ibn Sīrīn, from him, and in our commentary on Sūrah al-Layl we shall discuss the narration from him that says *Soon your Lord will give you and you will be pleased* (93:5) is even more hopeful than this verse.

(2) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī narrates from Aḥmad, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī's *Shuʿub al-īmān*, from Thawbān that he heard the Messenger of God say: 'Dearer to me than the world and all that it contains is the verse *O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls…* (39:53).' Someone asked: 'O Messenger of God! What about one who associates partners with God?' The Prophet fell silent, then said: 'Except he who associates partners with God.'

Author's comments: This narration is problematic, as we have already discussed that this verse explicitly pertains to idolatry (*shirk*) and that the verse is only qualified by the need for repentance (*tawba*).

(3) In the same source, al-Suyūṭī narrates from Ibn Abī Shayba and Muslim from Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī that he heard the Messenger of God say: 'If none of you ever sinned, God would create creatures who did sin so that He could forgive them.'

Author's comments: What this tradition says about forgiveness does not conflict with what we have said about forgiveness being conditioned on various causes, such as repentance and intercession.

(4) And in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, it is reported that the verse *O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls…*was revealed about Waḥshī, the killer of the Prophet's uncle Ḥamza, who wanted to embrace Islam but feared that his repentance would not be accepted. Then, when this verse was revealed, he embraced Islam.

Someone asked the Prophet: 'O Messenger of God! Is this for anyone in particular or for the Muslims in general?' He replied: 'Rather, it is for the Muslims in general!'

(5) In his *Saʿd al-suʿūd*, Ibn Ṭāwūs quotes the following from al-Kalbī's *Tafsīr*:

Waḥshī and a group of disbelievers sent a message to the Prophet that 'naught prevents us from embracing your religion except

that we have heard you recite in your scripture that the one who supplicates to other than God, kills an innocent, or commits fornication will be counted a sinner and punished eternally in Hellfire, and we have done all of those things.' So the Prophet replied to them with the verse: *excepting those who repent, attain faith, and act righteously* (25:70). Then they said: 'We fear that we will not act righteously.' So, he sent them the verse: *Indeed Allah does not forgive that any partner should be ascribed to Him, but He forgives anything besides that to whomever He wishes* (4:48). Then they said: 'We fear that we will not be amongst those whom God wishes to forgive.' So he sent them the verse: *O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed Allah will forgive all sins* (39:53). Whereat, they came and embraced Islam.

The Prophet told Waḥshī, the killer of Ḥamza: 'Do not let me see you, for I cannot bear the sight of you.' Therefore, Waḥshī went to Syria, and he died in Khammar.

Author's comments: Similar accounts are presented by al-Suyūṭī in *al-Durr al-manthūr* via a number of chains of transmission. Some of them say that the verse *O My servants who have committed excesses…* was revealed about Waḥshī, as per what we read in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, above. However, what weakens these accounts is that this chapter of the Qur'an was revealed in Mecca, whereas Waḥshī only embraced Islam after the Emigration. In addition to this, the report does not seem to make the forgiveness in this verse dependent upon repentance, and we have already seen that this does not accord with its context.

As for the statement 'he died in Khammar,' this may be a reference to Khammar, a place on the outskirts of Medina. However, it may also be an error and the correct reading is that he died in Homs, a city in Syria. Alternatively, it may be read as *khamr* (wine), in which case it means that he died because of his drinking, for he was a known wine bibber who was lashed more than once for this crime before he gave it up.

Know that there are also numerous traditions from the Imams of the Prophet's Household that apply these verses to their followers (*shīʿa*) and *janb Allāh* (vicinage of Allah, 36:56) to themselves. However, all of these represent extensions of the verses' meaning (*jarī*) rather than an explanation of them (*tafsīr*). For this reason, we have omitted them from our discussion here.

Verses 62 to 75

This section of verses draws the chapter to a close by summing-up the conclusions of the earlier arguments presented therein. It commands the Prophet to tell the polytheists that their demand that he should worship their deities does nothing but reveal their ignorance about God's station, and it reminds them that God revealed to the Prophet and the prophets who came before him that if anyone associated partners with God, all of their works would fail.

Then, God declares that the idolaters do not know Him in the manner that befits Him to be known, or else they would not have doubted His Lordship for an instant, nor would they have worshipped anyone besides Him. Finally, God provides a comprehensive explanation of how humankind will return to Him through His bringing about the Resurrection, which is another aspect of creation.

اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ ۖ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَكِيلٌ ﴿٦٢﴾

(39:62) ***Allah is creator of all things, and He watches over all things.***

This is a fact that the idolaters themselves have acknowledged previously, as shown by the earlier verse in this chapter: *If you ask them, 'Who created the heavens and the earth?' they will surely say, "Allah"'* (39:38). Recall that it was on this basis that the Qur'an attributed the governance and direction of all things to God.

The present verse is intended to prepare the ground for what comes next, namely that the governance and lordship of this world also belongs to God, as it has already been established time and again that creation is inseparable from governance. Hence, the conversation moves quickly from declaring that creation (*khalq*) belongs to God alone to declaring that sovereignty (*mulk*) belongs exclusively to Him as well, via the phrase *To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth* (39:63). Then, if sovereignty belongs exclusively to God, this means that He is the one who looks after each and everything and directs its affairs. We have already discussed in our commentary on the verse *That is Allah, your Lord, there is no god except Him, the creator of all things* (6:102) how creation encompasses all things.

…and He watches over all things: This is because everything that exists depends upon Him for its existence, which necessitates Him being the true possessor of all things. Therefore, nothing possesses anything—not even itself or anything that emanates from itself—except by virtue of God endowing it with ownership of that thing. This means that all things are utterly needy and cannot even look after their own affairs, but God is their true possessor and the one who looks after their affairs for them.

As for the fact that God grants them ownership of their own selves and actions, this is merely part of His governance and direction of the cosmos. It does not in any way contradict the fact that He watches over all things, as this does not mean that he delegates things affairs fully to themselves, as this would invalidate His guardianship [of them].

In short, because nothing that exists besides God actually possesses anything for itself, God is himself the one who watches over it and directs its affairs—and this is true of all things in the chain of cause-and-effect; God is the one true Lord of all of them.

Based on the above, it is clear that this verse was intended to call attention to His oneness in lordship, which is the purpose of all of this explanation. Some commentators have suggested that *Allah is the creator of all things* means that He is utterly without need and that whatever benefits or harms come about are ultimately felt by His servants, or that He means that He is the keeper of all things, as just as they need Him to exist in the first place, they also need Him to keep them in existence. However, these interpretations do not accord with the meaning of the verse.

لَهُ مَقَالِيدُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

(39:63) ***To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth, and those who disbelieve in the signs of Allah—it is they who are the losers.***

It is said that the term *miqālīd* (keys) means the same as *mafātīh*, except that there is no singular of *miqālī*.

The keys of the heavens and the earth are the keys to their treasuries (*khazā'in*), as per the verse, *Yet to Allah belong the treasuries of the heavens and the earth* (63:7). These treasuries are their hidden aspects from which appears everything that exists within them and the system that governs them; therefore, the keys are that which brings them out of their hidden

state and into the visible world, as per the verse: *There is not a thing but that its sources are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure* (15:21).

To claim possession of the keys of the heavens and the earth is to claim possession of their treasuries from which come the existences, provisions, durations, and appointed ends of things, as well as whatever they might face in the course of their journey from Him until such a time as they return to Him.

The verse *To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth* is intended to provide the rationale for why *He watches over all things*, which is why there is no conjunction between the two verses.

…and those who disbelieve in the signs of Allah—it is they who are the losers: We have already discussed how the verses *Allah is creator of all things… keys of the heavens and the earth* represents the conclusion derived from the arguments presented in the earlier verses of this chapter. Therefore, *and those who disbelieve in the signs of Allah* is in conjunction with *Allah is creator of all things*. This makes the meaning: The previous verses have demonstrated that God is the creator of all things, and therefore the owner of all things, and therefore the one who watches over all things—in other words, He is absolutely singular in His lordship and divinity. Therefore, those who disbelieve in the signs of their Lord and, in doing so, fail to acknowledge His oneness and therefore fail to worship Him, are the losers.

Some commentators have disagreed about what the phrase *and those who disbelieve in the signs of Allah* follows on from, mentioning a multitude of views. However, these are generally without basis. Therefore, whoever is interested can refer to the discussions in these works.

قُلْ أَفَغَيْرَ اللَّهِ تَأْمُرُونِّي أَعْبُدُ أَيُّهَا الْجَاهِلُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

(39:64) ***Say, 'Will you, then, bid me to worship other than Allah, O you senseless ones?'***

Having completed His synopsis of the proofs used in this chapter of the Qur'an for His oneness in creation (*khalq*), sovereignty (*mulk*), and governance (*tadbīr*), which consequently entails His oneness in lordship (*rubūbiyya*) and divinity (*ulūhiyya*), God now tells His Prophet to address the idolaters who are demanding that he worship their gods. He instructs him to tell them that these clear proofs leave no room to worship anyone besides God and that their demands are naught but ignorance.

The particle *fāʾ* (then) in *Will you, then, bid me to worship other than Allah…?* [a fa-ghayr Allāh taʾmarūnnī aʿbudu…] signifies that this follows logically from the two verses, *Allah is creator of all things… it is they who are the losers* (39:62–63). It is a rhetorical question meant to convey denial. Note that *ghayr Allāh* (other than God) is the object of the verb *aʿbudu* (worship), but it is placed at the beginning of the sentence to show that it is the central concern of the verse, and *taʾmurūnnī* (bid me) interjects between this object and its verb. Note also that *taʾmurūnnī* is originally *taʾmurūnanī*, but that one of the two letter *nūn*s was assimilated into the other.

…O you senseless ones? He addresses them by invoking their attribute of senselessness or ignorance (*jahl*) to show that their insistent demands that he worship other gods—in spite of all the signs they have been shown for God's oneness in lordship and divinity—are nothing short of foolishness.

وَلَقَدْ أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ وَإِلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ لَئِنْ أَشْرَكْتَ لَيَحْبَطَنَّ عَمَلُكَ وَلَتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ ﴿٦٥﴾

(39:65) ***Certainly it has been revealed to you and to those before you: 'If you ascribe a partner to Allah your works shall surely fail and you shall surely be among the losers.'***

This verse supports the conclusion drawn from the aforementioned rational proofs with an appeal to revelation. It is as if to say: 'Do not worship anything besides God, for this is stupidity. How could it be right for you to worship something other than God, when this is something forbidden by revelation, just as it is forbidden by reason?'

Certainly it has been revealed to you…: The *lām* in *la-qad ūḥiya ilayk* (Certainly it has been revealed to you) is for the swearing of an oath; the sentence, *If you ascribe a partner to Allah your works shall surely fail*, is an exposition of what was revealed to him. Therefore the connotation of this verse is: 'I swear, it has been revealed to you that if you ascribe a partner to Allah… and it was also revealed to the prophets and messengers who came before you that if you ascribe a partner to Allah, your works will surely fail, and you will surely be one of the losers.'

This verse is addressed to the Prophet and all of the other prophets besides him. It forbids them from associating partners with God and warns them that their deeds will come to naught and they will join the ranks

of the losers if they do so. This is genuinely addressed to them and the warning it contains for them is real. This is because, as we have already mentioned, the aim of this chapter is to emphasise that the Messenger of God is also commanded to believe; that whatever he summons the polytheists to believe in, he must also believe in this himself; and that whatever duties he calls upon them to fulfil, he must also fulfil these duties himself. In short, he is also one of those who submit to God, and that is why he cannot accept the invitation of the idolaters to worship their gods alongside the One God.

The fact that the prophets have been granted infallibility (*ʿiṣma*) by God and, by virtue of this, are incapable of committing sins does not mean they are absolved of any moral duties (*taklīf*) or that God cannot direct commandments and prohibitions to them. After all, were this so, it would be inconceivable for them to commit sins in the same way that it is inconceivable for any being without moral responsibility to commit sins, rather than because of their infallibility.

This is because infallibility—which is a faculty that renders it impossible for its bearer to commit sins—stems from the knowledge of the infallible, as we have already explained in our commentary on the verse *but they do not mislead anyone except themselves, and they cannot do you any harm* (4:113). This does not in any way compromise their free-will (*ikhtiyār*), which pertains to their deeds and means that they have the ability to perform or abstain from any voluntary action with their limbs.

To know with certainty that a particular action is harmful will prevent the bearer of this knowledge from performing that act. This is in the same way that someone who understands the effects of poison will not knowingly imbibe it. Their knowledge of this does not deprive them of their free-will, because they still have the power to choose whether or not to imbibe the poison (even if they will never choose to drink it). Therefore, infallibility does not in any way conflict with a person's moral agency.

The above demonstrates the weakness of the conclusion that some draw from God forbidding His Prophet from associating partners with Him and the like of that, namely that this is merely a formal prohibition and the intent is actually to forbid his people from associating partners with God. In other words, that this is a form of indirect address.

The reason for the weakness of this reading is clear based on the above. As for what we have said previously and those narrations which claim that these verses of the Qur'an that appear to address the Prophet are all actually forms of indirect address to his people, this does not mean that there

is anything wrong with directing moral commands to the Prophet. On the contrary, moral commands are usually addressed to people who can either obey or disobey them. Therefore, when they appear to be addressed to someone who will always obey them without any doubt, this actually makes the command more emphatic and eloquent.

…and you shall surely be among the losers: The meaning of this sentence is clear based on what has already been discussed. It is possible that the use of the definite article in *the losers* signifies familiarity (*lām al-ʿahd*), which would render the meaning: 'If you do this, you will be among those losers who deny God's signs, and turn away from the signs pointing to His oneness.'

بَلِ اللَّهَ فَاعْبُدْ وَكُنْ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾

(39:66) ***Rather, then worship only Allah*** **(bal Allāha fa-ʿbud),** ***and be among the grateful!***

Rather here is a transition from the prohibition conveyed by the previous verse, as if to say: 'Do not worship other than God, worship God instead!' The fact that *Allāh* (the object) is placed before the imperative verb *fa-ʿbud* (then worship) signifies exclusivity; namely, *worship only Allah*.

Some have said the particle *fāʾ* in *fa-ʿbud* (then worship) is superfluous (*zāʾida*) and used for emphasis. Others have said that it marks the consequent (*jazāʾ*) of an implicit conditional proposition (*sharṭ*), whose import is: 'If you are going worship anything…' or 'If you are someone with sense, *then worship only Allah.*'

…and be among the grateful! Meaning, 'And be, through your worship, one of those who are grateful for His blessings that demonstrate His oneness in lordship and divinity.' And we have already discussed—in our commentary on the verses, *and soon Allah will reward the grateful* (3:144) and *and You will not find most of them to be grateful* (7:17)—that the referent of 'the grateful' (*shākirīn*) in the truest sense of the word are God's exclusive servants (*mukhlaṣūn*), who have dedicated themselves entirely to Him and use His blessings in the way He intended.

وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ وَالْأَرْضُ جَمِيعًا قَبْضَتُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَالسَّمَاوَاتُ مَطْوِيَّاتٌ بِيَمِينِهِ ۚ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَىٰ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

(39:67) ***They do not regard Allah with the regard due to Him, yet***

the entire earth will be in His fist on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens, scrolled, in His right hand. Immaculate is He and exalted above what they associate.

The verb *qadar* (translated here as 'regard') literally means to measure or quantify something according to its size, number, weight, or the like thereof. However, it came to be used for abstract concepts such as rank or station as well.

Therefore, *They do not regard Allah with the regard due to Him* means that they do not know Him as they should know Him, for they do not know that all things will ultimately return to Him on the Resurrection, as indicated by the passage that begins with the following sentence, *yet the entire earth will be in His fist on the Day of Resurrection*, and continues until the end of the chapter. This passage describes how every means and recourse besides Him will be cut off on the Day of Judgment; He will seize the earth, roll up the heavens, and sound the trumpet, causing everything to die. Then He will resurrect them, and the earth will be illuminated by the light of her Lord; the book will be set up, the prophets and the witnesses will be brought, and He will pass Judgment and recompense each soul in full for what it has done. Then, he will drive the guilty into hell and lead the Godwary to paradise.

Now, when there is a being known to possess such sovereignty and power, this knowledge engenders an obligation to turn towards Him and worship Him alone, and to turn away from everything besides Him entirely. However, because the idolaters do not believe in the Resurrection, they underestimate God, and they do not know Him as He deserves to be known. As a result, they turn away from His worship to worship other things besides Him.

…yet the entire earth will be in His fist on the Day of Resurrection…: In other words, the earth and all the parts and causes that act upon one another; *qabḍa* (translated here as fist) is an infinitive (*maṣdar*) used in the sense of the past participle *maqbūḍa* (lit. 'grasped'), *qabḍ* (to grasp) a thing, or for a thing to be in your grasp, means that you have complete power over it *or* that you alone have power over it. It is the latter most meaning that is intended here, as indicated by the verse, *and all command that day will belong to Allah* (82:19), and other verses of the Qur'an.

As we have already discussed on more than one occasion, the meaning of all sovereignty, command, and power belonging to God on the Day of Judgment is not that this does not belong to Him at other times, as these are all eternally His. Rather, what is meant by these verses is that, on the

Day of Judgment, this fact will be plain for all to see. Therefore, when this verse says *the entire earth will be in His fist on the Day of Resurrection*, this means that it will be evident to all mankind that this has been the case, not that He did not have the entire earth in His grasp prior to this.

…and the heavens, scrolled, in His right hand: The right hand is typically seen as the stronger one and, therefore, is used to symbolise power. Based on their context, these two sentences—namely, *yet the entire earth will be in His fist on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens, scrolled, in His right hand*—signify that all worldly and heavenly means will be cut off on the Day of Resurrection, and it will become manifest to all that there is no agent in existence except God Almighty (*lā muʾaththir fī al-wujūd illa Allāh*).

Immaculate is He and exalted above what they associate: This declares God transcendent above the other gods who they associate with Him in lordship and divinity. They associate these gods with Him by ascribing the governance and management of the world to them and worshipping them besides Him.

وَنُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَصَعِقَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا مَنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ ۖ ثُمَّ نُفِخَ فِيهِ أُخْرَىٰ فَإِذَا هُمْ قِيَامٌ يَنْظُرُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

(39:68) ***And the Trumpet will be blown, and whoever is in the heavens will swoon and whoever is on the earth, except whomever Allah wishes. Then it will be blown a second time, behold, they will rise up, looking on!***

Based on the details provided in the Qur'an, it appears that the blowing of the trumpet (*nafakh al-ṣūr*) in fact refers to it being sounded twice: once to cause things to die and once to bring them back to life. This is also what the traditions of the Prophet's Household and some of the traditions narrated in Sunni sources from the Prophet indicate. However, there are other traditions that are more ambiguous about this, which has led some commentators to say the trumpet will be sounded three times: once to cause things to die, once to bring them back to life, and once to terrify and stun them (*fazaʿ wa ṣaʿiq*). Others still have said that the trumpet will be sounded four times, but it is extremely difficult to support this interpretation on the basis of the apparent meaning of the verses.

It is perhaps because of the preponderance of evidence for there only being two soundings of the trumpet—one to cause things to die and the

other to bring them back to life—that commentators have associated the sounding that causes them to swoon (*ṣaʿiq*) with the first time it is sounded. This is because one of the well-known meanings of *ṣaʿiq* is 'to lose consciousness.' In *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, al-Rāzī writes: 'The verb *ṣaʿiqa* means for someone to swoon, while the transitive *aṣʿaqa* means to cause someone else to swoon… as per the verse *and whoever is in the heavens will swoon* [ṣaʿiqa] *and whoever is on the earth*, meaning "they will die."'

…except whomever Allah wishes: This exception pertains to the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth, but commentators have disagreed about the identity of these who will not die at the blowing of the trumpet.

Some have said this refers to the archangels Gabriel (Jibraʾīl), Michael (Mikāʾīl), Raphael (Isrāfīl), and Azrael (ʿIzrāʾīl), for they will only die after this. Others have said it refers to these four and the Bearers of the Throne (*ḥamalat al-ʿarsh*). Others still have said these are the angel Riḍwān, the houris, the angel Mālik, and the Zabāniya (the angels of hell). Another opinion—and it is by far the most foolish—is that *whomever Allah wishes* refers to none other than God Himself. However, the reader will notice that none of the above opinions have any basis whatsoever in the words of the verses.

Of course, if we suppose that God has created something beyond the heavens and the earth, it could be that this exception refers to them as a disconnected exception (*istithnāʾ munqaṭiʿ*). Alternatively, it could be argued that death is merely the severing of souls from their bodies, and while their bodies might die, these souls do not. Therefore, they are the subject of the exception in this verse—making it a connected exception (*istithnāʾ muttaṣil*). This interpretation is supported by some narrations transmitted from the Imams of the Prophet's Household.[1]

Then it will be blown a second time, behold, they will rise up, looking on: The pronoun *it* refers to the trumpet, and *a second time* (ukhrā) is an adjective for an implicit noun, meaning *a second blowing* (nafakha ukhrā). Meanwhile, *qiyām* (rise up) is the plural of *qāʾim* (one who rises up or stands), while *yanẓurūn* (looking on) means either 'waiting expectantly' or 'looking' in the conventional sense of the word.

Therefore, the meaning of this passage is: 'The trumpet will be blown

1 For example, commenting on the verse *To whom does the sovereignty belong today?* (40:16), it is narrated that the answer *To Allah, the One, the All-paramount!* comes from the souls of the prophets. And there are other narrations aside from this. (Trans.)

a second blowing, whereat they will rise from their graves waiting for instructions…' *or* '…waiting to see what will be done with them…' *or* 'whereat they will be standing looking on, perplexed.'

The contents of this verse do not contradict the verses, *And when the Trumpet is blown, behold, there they will be, scrambling from their graves towards their Lord* (36:51), meaning that they will be hastening forth; *the day the Trumpet will be blown, and you will come in groups* (78:18); or *The day when the trumpet will be blown, whoever is in the heavens will be terrified and whoever is on the earth* (27:87). This is because the descriptions of their terror at the sound of the trumpet, their hastening from the graves to the Resurrection, and their coming forth in groups—like that of their standing and looking-on in the present verse—all describe different stages of the Resurrection, rather than a single event. Therefore, they do not conflict with one another.

وَأَشْرَقَتِ الْأَرْضُ بِنُورِ رَبِّهَا وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ وَجِيءَ بِالنَّبِيِّينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ
وَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ بِالْحَقِّ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾

(39:69) ***And the earth will glow with the light of her Lord, and the Book will be set up, and the prophets and the witnesses* (shuhadāʾ) *will be brought, and Judgment will be made between them with justice, and they will not be wronged.***

The earth will glow means that it will be illuminated, while *light* (*nūr*) here is used in its conventional meaning. God often uses the word *nūr* in the sense of visible light, but He also uses it to signify faith (*īmān*) or the Qur'an in the sense that each of them provide clarity for those in confusion and reveal what is hidden. For example, God says: Allah is the Guardian of the faithful: He brings them out of darkness into light (2:257), and He says: *So have faith in Allah and His Messenger and the light which We have sent down* (64:8).

Commentators have disagreed about the meaning of the phrase *the earth will glow with the light of her Lord*. Some have said that it will glow with a light that God creates directly, that does not exist through the mediation of luminous bodies such as the sun and moon. It is attributed to God (per *the light of her Lord*) in the same manner as God says *my Spirit* (15:29) or *she-camel of Allah* (7:73). However, there is no basis for this opinion.

Others have said that it means that God will become manifest (*tajallī*) to deliver Judgment, as per some of the reports narrated in Sunni sources.

However, even if these reports are sound, this does not necessarily entail that this claim is correct.

Still others have said that it means the earth will be illuminated by her Lord's justice (*ʿadl*) on the Day of Judgment, because the earth is brightened by justice in the same way as knowledge is brightened by action. However, just because it is possible to use light as a metaphor for justice, this does not mean that the verse has used the word light with this meaning in mind. Therefore, some evidence is required to make this claim, but none is provided.

In *al-Kashshāf*, al-Zamakhsharī says:

> 'God uses light (*nūr*) as a symbol for truth (*ḥaqq*) and conclusive proof (*burhān*) in various parts of the Qur'an, and this is an instance of this. Therefore, the verse means: "The earth will be illuminated by the truth and justice that will be established therein, the fairness that will spread across its surface through God's Judgment and the weighing of good and bad deeds." The indication that light is being used symbolically here is the fact that it is attributed to God's name (*the light of her Lord*), for He is the truth and the justice. At the same time, the fact that His name is then attributed to the earth (*the light of her Lord*) is because He will beautify it through spreading His justice throughout it, establishing the scales of justice upon it, and judging with the truth between those who inhabit it. For you will find no place more beautiful or civilised than one in which justice is present. Furthermore, this association shows that it is the earth's Lord and Creator who will establish justice upon it and the source of injustice in it is other than Him. The light that will illuminate the earth is nothing other than the setting up of the Book, the bringing of the prophets and the witnesses, and God's Judgment with truth. This is no different to how people will say to a just king, "You have illuminated the firmament with your justice and brightened the world through your fairness," or how they might say "the land was darkened by the injustice of so-and-so." God's Messenger has said: "Oppression is the darkness on the Day of Judgment," and just as the verse opens with the establishment of justice, it ends with the negation of oppression.'

There are two major issues with al-Zamakhsharī's interpretation. First of all, regarding his claim that the Qur'an frequently uses light as a symbol for the truth, the Qur'an, and conclusive proof, there is not a single

verse in which it appears to have been used to symbolise either the truth or conclusive proof.

Second, truth and justice are two different concepts, even if they may frequently appear together. So, even if the light mentioned in this verse is a symbolic representation of truth, it does not follow that it also means justice. However, in order to show that the meaning of *light* in this verse is justice, al-Zamakhsharī says 'light' symbolizes truth and justice, but then he assigns the meaning of justice to *light* without discussing the meaning of truth any further.

One possible interpretation of *the earth will glow with the light of her Lord* is that it refers to the fact that it will only be on the Day of Judgment that the curtain of the Unseen is pulled back to reveal the realities of things, such that deeds—whether good or evil, obedient or disobedient, and right or wrong—appear to onlookers as they really are. *Ishrāq* (glow, illuminate) means for something to be made visible by light, and there is no doubt that the one who will make things visible on that day is God, as all other agents of causality besides Him will have ceased to function. Therefore, things will be illuminated by the light they receive from Him.

While this illumination will encompass all that God's light falls upon, the verse specifically mentions the earth— *And the earth will glow with the light of her Lord*—because the purpose of this illumination on the Day of Resurrection is to reveal the condition of the earth and its inhabitants. Equally, God is invoked as the Lord of the Earth as an intimation to the idolaters who deny His lordship over the earth. And, with this in mind, what is meant by earth here is not merely the earth itself but everything it contains and everything that is associated with it, as we have already discussed in relation to the verse, *the entire earth will be in His fist on the Day of Resurrection* (39:67).

What we have presented here can be discerned from numerous places in the Qur'an. For example, the verses: *You were certainly oblivious of this. We have removed your veil from you, and so your sight is acute today* (50:22); *The day when every soul will find present whatever good it has done and whatever evil it has done* (3:30); and *On that day she will relate her chronicles for her Lord will have inspired her. On that day, mankind will issue forth in various groups to be shown their deeds. So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it* (99:4–8). There are many other verses indicating that people's actions will become manifest and tangible on the Day of Judgment, that their limbs will testify against them, and other such things.

…and the Book will be set up…: Some commentators have said this image means the *Ḥisāb*, or 'Accounting,' in which people will be held to account for their deeds. Others have said it refers to the records of deeds on whose basis people will be held to account and judged. Still others have said it is a reference to the *Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ*, or Guarded Tablet, as indicated by the verse: *This is Our book, which speaks truly against you. Indeed We used to record what you used to do.* (45:29).

…and the prophets and the witnesses will be brought…: The prophets will be brought so that they might be questioned about whether they delivered their divine messages to their peoples, as indicated by the context here, and by the verse: *We will surely question those to whom the messengers were sent, and We will surely question the messengers* (7:6). As for the witnesses (*shuhadāʾ*), they are the witnesses to peoples' deeds, and they will deliver the testimony they carry with them, as per the verse: *So how shall it be, when We bring from every nation a witness and We bring you as a witness to them?* (4:41).

…and Judgment will be made between them with justice, and they will not be wronged: The pronouns *them* and *they* refer to humankind, as is clear from the context. *Judgment will be made between them* here means that God will judge between them concerning those things they differed about, as the Qur'an has repeatedly said He will do: *Your Lord will indeed judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which they used to differ* (10:93).

وَوُفِّيَتْ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَا عَمِلَتْ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

(39:70) ***Every soul will be recompensed fully for what it has done, and He is best aware of what they do.***

The verb *tawfiya* (to recompense fully) means to pay someone everything that they are owed. Notice that the verse says each soul will be paid in full *for what it has done* rather than saying it will be given 'its recompense.' This is to dispel any doubts the audience may harbour about the fairness or justice of God's Judgment, as though the verse is intended as an exposition of the ending of the previous one: *and they will not be wronged*.

… and He is best aware of what they do: In other words, God does not need to set up the Book or bring the prophets and the witnesses because He has need of them or because He is lacking in knowledge. On the contrary, it is because His Judgment is based on justice and fairness, as He already knows well what they do.

Note that the previous verse dealt with Judgment, this verse deals with its implementation, and the following verse will deal with the details of this.

وَسِيقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ زُمَرًا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا فُتِحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا
وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِنْكُمْ يَتْلُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِ
رَبِّكُمْ وَيُنْذِرُونَكُمْ لِقَاءَ يَوْمِكُمْ هَٰذَا ۚ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ وَلَٰكِنْ حَقَّتْ كَلِمَةُ
الْعَذَابِ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٧١﴾

(39:71) ***The faithless will be driven to hell in throngs. When they come to it, and its gates are opened, its keepers will say to them, 'Did there not come to you messengers from among yourselves, reciting to you the signs of your Lord and warning you of the encounter of this day of yours?' They will say, 'Yes, but the word of punishment became due against the faithless.'***

According to al-Ṭabrisī in *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, *sawq* (to drive) means to urge forward. At the same time, in *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, al-Rāzī says that *zumar* (throngs, plural of *zumra*) signifies a group of people.

This renders the meaning as follows: *The faithless will be driven*—urged forward—*to hell in throngs*—one group after another. *When they come to it*—reach it—*and its gates are opened*—for them to enter it, and there are seven of these, as per the verse, *It has seven gates* (15:44)— *its keepers*—who are the angels responsible for it—*will say to them*—reprovingly and in rebuke—'*Did there not come to you messengers from among yourselves*—from your own species—*reciting to you the signs of your Lord*—the decisive arguments for His oneness and your duty to worship Him—*and warning you of the encounter of this day of yours?' They will say, 'Yes*—they came and recited these signs to us—*but*—we denied them and disbelieved, so—*the word of punishment became due against the faithless.*' And the phrase *word of punishment* (kalimat al-ᶜadhāb) is a reference to what God told Adam when he descended to earth: '*But those who are faithless and deny Our signs, they shall be the inmates of the Fire and they shall remain in it*' (2:39).

قِيلَ ادْخُلُوا أَبْوَابَ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ۖ فَبِئْسَ مَثْوَى الْمُتَكَبِّرِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾

(39:72) ***It will be said, 'Enter the gates of hell to remain in it. Evil***

is the abode of the arrogant.'

Based on the context, it appears the speakers in this verse are the angels responsible for guarding hell. The phrase, *Evil is the abode of the arrogant*, shows that *the faithless* in the previous verse are those who denied God's signs and obstinately rejected the truth.

وَسِيقَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ زُمَرًا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا وَفُتِحَتْ
أَبْوَابُهَا وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ طِبْتُمْ فَادْخُلُوهَا خَالِدِينَ ﴿٧٣﴾

(39:73) ***Those who are wary of their Lord will be driven to paradise in throngs. When they reach it, and its gates are opened, and its keepers say to them, 'Peace be to you! You are blessed! Enter it to remain.'***

Unlike the previous verse, there is no consequent mentioned for the conditional *idhā* (when) in this verse. This is to show that the reality of paradise is beyond the power of human language to encapsulate. The phrase *and its gates are opened* is an adverb (*ḥāl*), which renders the meaning: 'When they reach it, and its gates have been opened.' *And its keepers*—the angels tasked with maintaining paradise—*say to them, 'Peace be to you! You are blessed! Enter it to remain.'*

Therefore, the meaning is as follows: *Those who are wary of their Lord will be driven*—urged forward—*to paradise in throngs*—one group after another. *When they reach it, and its* gates—have been—opened, *and its keepers*—the angels responsible for paradise—*will say to them*—in order to greet and welcome them—*'Peace be to you!*—you are now in utter peace, and nothing will befall you save that which you desire—*You are blessed!*—and perhaps this is mentioned as the reason for their being greeted with peace—*Enter it to remain.'* And this is the effect of their blessedness.

وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي صَدَقَنَا وَعْدَهُ وَأَوْرَثَنَا الْأَرْضَ نَتَبَوَّأُ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ
حَيْثُ نَشَاءُ ۖ فَنِعْمَ أَجْرُ الْعَامِلِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾

(39:74) ***They will say, 'All praise belongs to Allah, who has fulfilled His promise to us and made us heirs to the earth, that we may settle in paradise wherever we may wish! How excellent is the reward of the doers!'***

The speakers in this verse are the Godwary. Some have understood

the promise they refer to here as the pledge that God makes repeatedly throughout the Qur'an and in His revelation to all of His prophets, namely that the Godwary are guaranteed paradise. For example, see the verses: *For those who are Godwary there will be gardens near their Lord* (3:15); and *Indeed for the Godwary there will be gardens of bliss near their Lord* (68:34). Others have said that the promise mentioned here is the promise of resurrection and reward.

It is also possible that the promise referenced here is the promise to make them inheritors of paradise, as per the verse: *It is they who will be the inheritors, who shall inherit paradise, and will remain therein* (23:11). In this case, the phrase *and made us heirs to the earth* is an exposition of *who has fulfilled His promise to us*.

As for *and made us heirs to the earth*, some commentators have said that the meaning of earth here is paradise, as 'the earth' (*arḍ*) means the ground upon which one dwells. And we have already discussed in our commentary on the opening verses of Sūrah al-Muʾminūn that the meaning of their 'inheriting' (*wirātha*) paradise is that it will remain theirs, whereas they had previously shared the world with others or had been forced to live under their dominion. However, those others have now left the world and, thus, it has become theirs alone.

…that we may settle in paradise wherever we may wish: This explains the meaning of their inheriting the earth; note that instead of using a pronoun to refer to the earth, the verse refers to it as paradise to show that this is what is really meant by the word 'earth' (*arḍ*) in this context.

Some have said that the meaning of earth here is this world, which is nonsensical, unless of course by this they mean that paradise is the ultimate outcome of this worldly abode, as per the verse: *For such will be the outcome of the abode.*

Therefore, the meaning of this verse is: 'After they enter paradise, the Godwary will say: Praise belongs to God who fulfilled His promise to admit us to paradise' *or* '…to make us inheritors of paradise, such that we can settle wherever we please or desire therein'—for they shall have whatever they desire in it.

How excellent is the reward of the doers: That is, how excellent is the reward of those who act for the sake of God. Based on its context, this phrase is also spoken by the inhabitants of paradise, although it could also be part of God's speech.

وَتَرَى الْمَلَائِكَةَ حَافِّينَ مِنْ حَوْلِ الْعَرْشِ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ ۖ وَقُضِيَ

بَيْنَهُمْ بِالْحَقِّ وَقِيلَ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٧٥﴾

(39:75) ***And you will see the angels surrounding the Throne, celebrating the praise of their Lord, and Judgment will be made between them with justice, and it will be said, 'All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds!'***

The word *ḥaff* (to surround) means to encircle and enclose something; the Throne (*al-ʿarsh*) is the station from which emanates the divine edicts and commands which govern the cosmos; the angels are those who execute God's will by His command. To see the angels in this state is an allusion to the fact that all of this will become manifest on the Day of Judgment now that the heavens have been rolled up like scrolls.

The meaning of this passage is: 'On that day, you will see the angels while they encircle the Throne, hastening to fulfil the commands that emanate from it while celebrating the praise of their Lord.'

…and Judgment will be made between them: It is possible that the pronoun *them* refers to the angels, or to the angels and humankind both, or to all of God's creatures, or to humankind alone, in the sense of judging between the inhabitants of heaven and the inmates of hell, or in the sense of judging between the prophets and their peoples.

The plausibility of the latter most reading is decreased by the fact that this section of verses has already described God's Judgment between people in the verse, *and Judgment will be made between them with justice, and they will not be wronged* (39:69). Therefore, to mention it again would be an unnecessary repetition.

However, the apparent meaning of 'judging between a group' means to rule in favour of some and against others because of some disagreement between them. However, there can be no disagreement amongst the angels, which means that this pronoun should not refer to them but others. At the same time, while Judgment can refer to the ruling of a judge in a particular case, it can also refer to the whole process to which this ruling is central, which includes its preliminaries and consequences, such as summoning the two parties to present their respective cases, hearing the testimony of witnesses, the issuance of a verdict, and the implementation of this verdict. Therefore, it is possible that the meaning of Judgment (*qaḍāʾ*) here first of all refers to the divine verdict itself and, secondly, to the entirety of the process to which it is central. This would begin with the resurrection of the human race and up until and including the consignment of the inmates

of hell to hell and the admission of the inhabitants of paradise to paradise and each of them residing in their respective abodes. This reading would deal with the objection of unnecessary repetition.

…and it will be said, 'All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds': These are the final words of both the origination and the return; to praise God universally because He has only done and only will do that which is beautiful.

Some commentators have said these are the words of the Godwary and that they uttered their first statement of praise (see above) when they entered paradise and then uttered this one when God judged between them and others with justice. Others have said that these are the words of the angels, but they are not explicitly attributed to them in order to magnify their importance. Still others have said that these are the words of all of God's creatures.

The first opinion is supported by God's description of the inhabitants of paradise in Sūrah Yūnus: *and their concluding call, 'All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds'* (10:10). And, as we have already mentioned, this is a universal praise that concludes His creation.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse: *If you ascribe a partner to Allah your works shall surely fail and you shall surely be among the losers* (39:65), we read: 'It is addressed to the Prophet but it is meant for his people, as has been said by Imam al-Ṣādiq: "Surely God spoke to His Prophet using indirect speech."'

(2) And in his *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, al-Ṣadūq narrates via a chain of narrators leading back to al-Fuḍayl b. Yasār, who heard Imam al-Ṣādiq say: 'Surely God Almighty cannot be described.'

(3) And al-Ṣadūq narrates from Zurāra that Imam al-Bāqir said: 'Surely God cannot be described. How could he be described, when He has said in His Book, *They do not regard Allah with the regard due to Him* (39:67)? He is not described by any measure save that He is greater than it.'

(4) And in the same source, al-Ṣadūq narrates via his chain of narrators from Sulaymān b. Mihrān that he asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about the verse *yet the entire earth will be in His fist* [qabḍa] *on the Day of Resurrection* (39:67).

The Imam said: 'It will be His dominion, upon which no one besides Him will have any claim. Elsewhere, God uses the term

qabḍ to mean withholding, while *basaṭ* (expanding) means giving and increasing: *And Allah tightens and expands, and to Him you shall be brought back* (2:245)—meaning that He gives, expands, and contracts. In yet other contexts, *qabḍ* means for Him to take something in the sense of accepting it, as per the verse: *and receives the charities* (9:104), meaning He accepts it from those who give it and rewards them for it.'

Sulaymān b. Mihrān asked: 'So what about His saying *and the heavens, scrolled, in His right hand* (39:67)?'

Imam al-Ṣādiq replied: 'The right hand symbolizes power and strength. So, when He says *and the heavens, scrolled, in His right hand*, He means that they are rolled up by His power and His strength, glorified is He above what they associate!'

Author's comments: al-Suyūṭī narrates in *al-Durr al-manthūr* from Abū Hurayra, from the Prophet about the verse, *and whoever is in the heavens will swoon and whoever is on the earth, except whomever Allah wishes* (39:68): 'They are the martyrs girded with their swords around God's throne.'

The apparent meaning of this tradition is that this sounding of the trumpet does not cause everyone to die, but we have already seen that the apparent meaning of the verse contradicts this.

(5) And al-Suyūṭī narrates from Anas, from the Prophet: 'They are Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, and the Angel of Death, and the bearers of the throne, and they will die after this.' However, once again, the verse's apparent meaning contradicts this.

(6) And he narrates from Jābir: 'Except for Moses, because he lost consciousness before.' However, regardless of whether we understand *ṣaʿiq* to mean death or merely a loss of consciousness, Moses was not the only one to experience this.

(7) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, about the verse, *It has seven gates* (15:44), al-Ṭabrisī writes that there are two opinions. One of them is in the tradition narrated from the Commander of the Faithful, saying that 'hell has seven gates, whose levels are one on top of another, like so' and he illustrated this by placing one of hands above the other, then said: 'God will place the gardens of paradise upon the earth, and he will stack the fires of hell one on top of another. The lowest of these is Jahannam, above which is Laẓan (Inferno), above which is al-Ḥutama (the Crusher), above which is Saqar, above which is al-Jaḥīm, above which is al-Saʿīr (the Blaze), above

with is al-Hāwiya (the Pit).' And in the narration of al-Kalbī, the lowest level of Hell is al-Hāwiya and the highest is Jahannam.

(8) In *al-Khiṣāl*, al-Ṣadūq narrates from Imam al-Ṣādiq, from his father, from his grandfather, from ʿAlī: 'Paradise has eight gates: a gate through which the prophets and the veracious will enter, a gate through which the martyrs and the righteous will enter, and five gates through which our followers and those who love us will enter. And I shall remain standing upon *al-Ṣirāt* (the Bridge) saying: 'My Lord! Keep my followers, my supporters, and those who love me safe, and all those who were my allies in the world.' Then there will come a call from the depths of God's Throne, saying: 'I have answered your supplication and accepted your intercession for your followers.' Then each and every man from my followers, and those who were my allies and came to my aid and fought those who fought me in word or in deed, shall be able to intercede for seventy thousand of their neighbors and near relatives. Then, there is a gate through which the remainder of the Muslims will enter—those who bear witness that there is no god but God and in whose heart there is not so much as an atom's weight of hatred for us, the Prophet's Household.'

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Chapter 40

Sūrah al-Muʾmin (or al-Ghāfir)

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Verses 1 to 6

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

This chapter of the Qur'an discusses the arrogance of the disbelievers and their recourse to disputations based on falsehood in order to invalidate the truth to which they were being called. This is the reason why the chapter returns to the subject of the disputation time and again:

> *No one disputes the signs of Allah except the faithless. So do not be misled by their bustle in the towns* (40:3).
>
> *Those who dispute the signs of Allah without any authority that may have come to them are greatly outrageous* (40:35).
>
> *Have you not regarded those who dispute the signs of Allah, where they are being led away?* (40:69).

This chapter responds to their arrogant disputation by recounting the fate that God caused to befall the nations who denied His signs before them and the humiliating punishment that He has prepared for them by mentioning some of what will happen to them in the Hereafter.

At the same time, it refutes their false claims by presenting arguments for God's unity in lordship and divinity. It also enjoins the Prophet to be steadfast while promising divine assistance to him and the faithful, and bids him proclaim to the disbelievers that he has submitted to his Lord and that he will never forsake His worship, so that they despair of overcoming him.

It is clear that the chapter is Meccan in its entirety, both from the connectedness of its verses and the nature of its content, and claims that some of it was revealed in Medina have no merit, as we shall discuss below.

حم ﴿١﴾ تَنْزِيلُ الْكِتَابِ مِنَ اللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ ﴿٢﴾

(40:1–2) *Ḥāʾ, Mīm: The sending down of the Book is from Allah, the All-mighty, the All-knowing,*

'Sending down' (*tanzīl*) here is an infinitive used in the sense of a passive participle (*maṣdar bi maʿnā l-mafʿūl*), and it is in a possessive construct with *the Book* as an adjective is joined to a noun. Hence, the meaning is: This Book is sent down by God.

The verse specifically mentions the two divine attributes of *the All-mighty, the All-knowing*. Some say this is to call attention to the Qur'ans miraculous inimitability and astounding knowledge it contains, which would stretch the capacity of human comprehension. Others have said these attributes were chosen for stylistic reasons.

However, the most appropriate theory is that the chapter is speaking about the disbelievers obstinate rejection of the truth and their disputing God's signs falsely because of their ignorance. What is more, they have mistaken this ignorance for knowledge and taken pride in it, as we read at the end of the chapter: *When their messengers brought them manifest proofs, they exulted in the knowledge they possessed* (40:83). This is akin to what Pharaoh told his people about Moses: *Indeed I fear that he will change your religion, or bring forth corruption in the land* (40:26), and what he subsequently told them: *I just point out to you what I see to be advisable, and I guide you only to the way of rectitude* (40:29).

The discourse of this chapter begins by highlighting that this Book has been sent down to them from One whose might is infinite and whom none can overpower (and who, therefore, has nothing to fear from their arrogance and haughtiness that rests on their own delusions), and whose knowledge is absolute and uncontaminated by ignorance or error (so their false arguments do nothing against the truth He has sent down and explained with conclusive evidence).

This reading is supported by the following verse, which reads: *forgiver of sins and acceptor of repentance* (40:3).

غَافِرِ الذَّنْبِ وَقَابِلِ التَّوْبِ شَدِيدِ الْعِقَابِ ذِي الطَّوْلِ ۖ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ إِلَيْهِ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٣﴾

(40:3) *forgiver of sins and acceptor of repentance, severe in retribution, all-bountiful, there is no Allah except Him, toward Him is the destination.*

The active participle (forgiver, *ghāfir*; and acceptor, *qābil*) is used in

the phrase *forgiver of sins and acceptor of repentance* to show that this is something continuous and ongoing from God; after all, forgiveness and the acceptance of repentance are both divine attributes of action (*ṣifāt fiʿliyya*), God is forever forgiving one sin after another and accepting one repentance after another.

Note that the conjunction *and* is only used for *forgiver of sins and acceptor of repentance* but not for *severe in retribution*. This is because forgiving sins and accepting repentance, taken together, resemble a single divine attribute that is associated with God's sinful servants; sometimes God forgives them because of their repentance, and other times He forgives them for other reasons, such as intercession.

Retribution (*ʿiqāb*) means to seize someone as a consequence of their sins. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī writes: The Arabic words *ʿuqb* and *ʿuqbā* ('end', 'outcome') are always used in the sense of 'reward' (*thawāb*), as in the verses: *He is the best in rewarding and the best in requiting* (18:44), and *For such will be the requital of the abode* (13:22). The Arabic word *ʿāqiba* ('outcome' or 'fate') can be used for reward, as in *and the outcome will be in favour of the Allahwary* (28:83), or it can be used for a punishment, as in *Then the fate of those who committed misdeeds* (30:10), or the verse: *So the fate of both is that they will be in the Fire* (59:17). Of course, this could also be an ironic usage of *ʿāqiba* to signify the opposite of its literal meaning. At the same time, *ʿuqūba*, *muʿāqaba*, and *ʿiqāb* (all meaning 'penalty') are only used to denote punishments.

Therefore, severe in retribution (*shadīd al-ʿiqāb*) is equivalent in meaning to the divine name, Endowed with Vengeance (*dhū al-intiqām*), which is one of God's Most-Beautiful Names. It relates to God's aspect as a punisher, while attributes such as the Oft-forgiving (*al-ghafūr*) and the Most merciful (*al-raḥīm*) relate to His aspect of mercy.

All-bountiful (*al-ṭawl*), according to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, refers to blessings which endure for a lengthy duration for the one who receives them. Possessed of Enduring Bounty (*dhū al-ṭawl*) is one of God's Most-Beautiful Names which signifies Him being a source of blessings. However, this is more specific than the Bestower of Blessings (*al-Munʿim*) because the latter also encompasses blessings of shorter duration.

The Qur'an mentions these four divine names: Forgiver of sins and acceptor of repentance, severe in retribution, and all-bountiful after the divine name of all-knowing (*al-ʿalīm*). This is to show that He sent down this Book, which contains His true call, based on His knowledge, which rests on the foundations of the meanings of these four names.

This is because while the human world collectively receives God's enduring bounties and human beings enjoy His never-ceasing blessings throughout their lives in this world, they are divided with regards to the Hereafter into two branches: those who will be felicitous in the next life and those who will be miserable. God knows every detail of His creation—how can He not, when He created it and directs it? When He describes Himself as the *forgiver of sins and acceptor of repentance*, this means that He forgives those who are ready for forgiveness and He accepts the repentance of those who turn to Him penitently. Equally, when He describes Himself as *severe in retribution*, He means that He will punish those who deserve it.

This means that He guides people to the path of felicity, as He says: *and indeed to Us belong the world and the Hereafter* (92:13), and *With Allah rests guidance to the straight path* (16:9).

This is in order to separate mankind into two groups and distinguish the felicitous from the wretched and the guided from the astray, in order to have mercy on the former and punish the latter.

So the sending down of the Book from God, the All-mighty, the All-knowing is based on His all-encompassing knowledge of His creatures, namely that they are in need of a call (*da'wa*) to guide some people and to lead others astray through their rejection of it, in order that He might forgive one group for their sins and punish the others for theirs. They also need a divine message to help them organise their lives in this world, so they benefit from His generosity and blessings in both this life and in the next.

This is the status of His Book, which He has sent down with His knowledge unadulterated by ignorance on the basis of the truth unmixed with falsehood. What right do those who know nothing but the appearances of this world have to dispute using falsehood in order to rebut the truth?

This divine concern for knowledge that we have mentioned is also visible in the prayer of the angels asking for forgiveness for the faithful, which God quotes in the verse: *Our Lord! You comprehend all things in mercy and knowledge. So forgive those who repent and follow Your way* (40:7).

Returning to the verse under discussion, *there is no Allah except Him, toward Him is the destination* invokes the formula of divine unity (*there is no Allah except Him*) to explain why it is obligatory to only worship Him and thereby avoid invalidating the religious call the Book represents. When the verse says that He is everyone's destination, this is a reference to the

Resurrection, and this shows that this is the primary reason to call them to believe in the Book and to follow its teachings. This is because belief in the Day of Reckoning gives rise to fear and hope; fear of punishment and hope of reward, which are two of the key reasons for someone to worship God.

مَا يُجَادِلُ فِي آيَاتِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَلَا يَغْرُرْكَ تَقَلُّبُهُمْ فِي الْبِلَادِ ﴿٤﴾

(40:4) ***No one disputes the signs of Allah except the faithless. So do not be misled by their bustle in the towns.***

So far, this chapter has mentioned that the Book was sent down by God and presented a conclusive demonstration of its truthfulness, which derives from His divine attributes enumerated in the two verses. These, in turn, indicate that He sent it down on His peerless knowledge, which is uncontaminated by ignorance, and based on the truth, which is not invalidated by falsehood. Having laid this out above, the chapter now turns to address the subject those who oppose His truthful proofs through recourse to false arguments. It indicates that they are the people who will be punished in the Hereafter; they will neither be forgotten nor neglected, for just as the Book was sent down to forgive sins and accept repentance, it was also sent down to punish the guilty. Therefore, the Prophet should not let their obstinacy grieve him or their worldly condition deceive him as regards their ultimate fate.

God said: *No one disputes the signs of Allah*. He did not say: No one disputes it or disputes the Qur'an to show that their argument concerns the truth to which those signs point in their function as signs. And even though the one with whom they argue is the Prophet, this is because he is the one who calls them to the truth that those signs signify. They argue in order to reject the truth rather than to defend it. Therefore, when the subsequent verses speak about arguing and disputation, this refers to argumentation using falsehood to refute the truth.

Therefore, the meaning of disputing the signs of God means arguing in order to invalidate and refute them, which is something morally repugnant. This is not in the same category as arguing in defence of the truth. How could it be when God Himself commands His prophet to argue in the best possible manner: *and dispute with them in a manner that is best* (16:125)?

When God says: …*except the faithless*… based on the context, the apparent meaning of 'the faithless' (*alladhīna kafarū*) here is those in whose hearts faithlessness has become deeply rooted such that there is no hope of removing it. That is why God uses the particle of negation *mā* instead of *lā* in *No one disputes…* (*mā yujādil*). Equally, *so do not be misled by their bustle in the towns* shows that the referents of this verse are the disbelievers who are contemporary with the Prophet, even if they were not necessarily inhabitants of Mecca.

Their bustle in the towns means their moving through the different stages of their lives, from one divine blessing to another, whether health, comfort, or ease. The verse tells the Prophet not to be deceived by their bustle in the towns; this means that he should not be misled by their outward state into thinking that they had outmaneuvered God or shown Him to be impotent.

كَذَّبَتْ قَبْلَهُمْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ وَالْأَحْزَابُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ ۖ وَهَمَّتْ كُلُّ أُمَّةٍ بِرَسُولِهِمْ
لِيَأْخُذُوهُ ۖ وَجَادَلُوا بِالْبَاطِلِ لِيُدْحِضُوا بِهِ الْحَقَّ فَأَخَذْتُهُمْ ۖ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ
عِقَابِ ۝٥

(40:5) ***The people of Noah denied before them and the factions after them. Every nation attempted to lay hands on their messenger, and disputed erroneously to refute the truth. Then I seized them; so how was My retribution?!***

This verse is a response to a thought that might occur to someone that they had been arrogant and disputed God's signs, but nothing happened to them and that they were the first to do this.

In response, God says that previous nations like the people of Noah and the factions that came after them, like ʿĀd, Thamūd, Lots people, and others who came before them had all done the same as they did: They denied God's signs, argued against them using falsehood, and attacked God's messengers, but then the punishment descended on them. In the same manner, the disbelievers have been sentenced to divine punishment. So, their belief that they had outmaneuvered the will of God through their behavior is utterly false.

So the passage, *the people of Noah denied before them and the factions after them*, is to refute that supposition they may have entertained, which is why it does not begin with a conjunction to link it to the phrase before.

Every nation attempted to lay hands on their messenger… means that

they intended to seize the messenger God had sent to them to either kill him, expel him, or do some other harm to him, as God recounts in the stories of the prophets.

…and disputed erroneously to refute the truth [and reject it.] Then I seized them…: Meaning: I punished them. Notice that there is a shift from the third person to God referring to Himself in the first-person here, which shows that the fate they will suffer for their arrogance and rebelliousness is dependent upon God alone, such that no one else can intervene between Him and them to help them or intercede on their behalf: *…so your Lord poured on them lashes of punishment. Indeed your Lord is in ambush* (89:14).

When God says, *so how was My retribution?!* this is to call to the listeners mind to what they already know about how those people were punished so that they comprehend the severity of God's punishment as recounted in the stories that God has recounted about them.

وَكَذَٰلِكَ حَقَّتْ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّهُمْ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ ﴿٦﴾

(40:6) ***That is how the word of your Lord became due concerning the faithless, that they shall be inmates of the Fire.***

Based on the context, *that* refers to the previous verses description of God seizing them and punishing them. *The faithless* in this verse refers to all past disbelievers. As a whole, this means in the same way that God seized the deniers and punished them in this world, His word has become due against all of the disbelievers for the punishment of the Hereafter, including the disbelievers amongst your own people.

Some have said that *the faithless* here refers to the disbelievers of Mecca, but neither the context nor the comparison in the verse draws support for such a reading.

God used the expression 'the word of your Lord' (*kalimatu rabbik*) rather than My word (*kalimatī*) in order to reassure the Prophet of His assistance by showing him that the pillar that he relies upon for support is strong and powerful.

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Verses 7 to 12

The previous set of verses described how the faithless reject the divine message and try to repudiate the signs of God by recourse to falsehood, before indicating that not only were these deniers incapable of thwarting God's plans, but that also they would not be forgotten or overlooked. On the contrary, they were the target of this call in order that they might be distinguished from others, God's word might become due against them, and they would be chastised.

Following this, the discourse returns to the topic raised in the very first verse of this chapter, namely the sending down of the Book and the divine call for the forgiveness of some and the acceptance of their repentance and the punishment of others. It discusses how people fall into two groups based on their response to this divine call: One group—those who repent to God, follow His way, and their righteous forebears, spouses, and children—are those for whom the angels who carry and circle the Divine Throne pray for forgiveness, while the other group—those who deny God's oneness—are those who will be detested and punished.

الَّذِينَ يَحْمِلُونَ الْعَرْشَ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَيُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا رَبَّنَا وَسِعْتَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ رَحْمَةً وَعِلْمًا فَاغْفِرْ لِلَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَاتَّبَعُوا سَبِيلَكَ وَقِهِمْ عَذَابَ الْجَحِيمِ ﴿٧﴾

(40:7) ***Those who bear the Throne and those around it celebrate the praise of their Lord and have faith in Him, and they plead for forgiveness for the faithful: Our Lord! You encompass all things in mercy and knowledge. So forgive those who repent and follow Your way and save them from the punishment of hell.***

One might ask why God does not identify who the bearers of His Throne are in this verse? And why does He not explicitly say anywhere else that they are angels? However, the fact *Those who bear the Throne* is joined to the phrase *and those around it* suggests that they are of the same species as one another. Now, elsewhere, we read, *And you will see the angels surrounding the Throne…* (39:75). Therefore, those who carry the Throne must also be angels.

We have already discussed the meaning of the Throne, in part eight of this work.

Those who bear the Throne and those around it: Meaning the angels who carry the Throne, from whence God's commands emerge and His ordinances to direct the affairs of the world are issued. The angels who are around the Throne are the angels brought-near (*al-malāʾika al-muqarrabūn*).

…celebrate the praise of their Lord: Meaning they glorify Him while at the same time praising Him, so as well as divesting Him of all that does not befit His divinity, such as the existence of a partner or an equal, they also praise Him for His actions and His governance.

…and have faith in Him: What does it mean for them to have faith (*īmān*) in Him while they are carrying or circling the Throne, which represents His sovereignty over the cosmos, in order to receive His commands and to extol Him above every defect and praise Him for all that He does? It means that they believe in His absolute oneness in lordship and divinity. By mentioning the throne, and attributing God's glorification and praise and faith in Him to the angels, the Qur'an refutes the claim of the idolaters that the highest angels are God's partners in His lordship and divinity whom they take as deities and lords worthy of worship and reverence in their own right.

…and they plead for forgiveness for the faithful: They ask God to forgive those who believe.

…Our Lord! You encompass all things in mercy and knowledge: This relates the supplication of the angels in seeking forgiveness for the faithful; they begin by praising Him for the breadth of His mercy and knowledge. They mention His mercy and join it to His knowledge because it is through His mercy that He blesses all who are in need, so mercy is the origin of every blessing that emanates from Him. However, it is through His knowledge that He knows the need of each and every needy person that is prepared to receive His mercy.

…So forgive those who repent and follow Your way and save them from the punishment of hell: This builds on their praise of the breadth of His mercy and knowledge. The meaning of 'way' (*sabīl*) here is the path that has been laid out of them through religion, namely Islam, and their following it (*ittibāʿ*) means bringing their actions into alignment with it. In this context, repentance (*tawba*) means returning to Him with their faith. Therefore, this passage as a whole means: Forgive those who return to You believing in Your oneness and walk upon your path, which is Islam,

and protect them from the punishment of hell. And this is, in fact, the utmost purpose and goal of divine forgiveness.

رَبَّنَا وَأَدْخِلْهُمْ جَنَّاتِ عَدْنٍ الَّتِي وَعَدْتَهُمْ وَمَنْ صَلَحَ مِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ ۚ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٨﴾

(40:8) ***Our Lord! Admit them into the Gardens of Eden, which You have promised them, along with whoever is worthy among their forebears, their spouses and their descendants. Indeed You are the All-mighty, the All-wise.***

The phrase *Our Lord!* is repeated here to invoke sympathy, and *You have promised them* means He has promised them through the words of His prophets and messengers and in their scriptures.

…along with whoever is worthy among their forebears, their spouses and their descendants: Grammatically, this sentence is joined to the pronoun *them* in the phrase *Admit them…* and *worthy* means worthy of entering paradise. In other words, And admit to the Gardens of Eden with them whoever is worthy of entering paradise among their forebears, their spouses, and their descendants.

From the context, it is evident that this plea for forgiveness is offered on behalf of all the faithful believers. It is also evident that they are also divided into two groups; those who repent and follow the way of God and to whom God has promised paradise and those who are worthy of entering paradise. According to the angels, then, the first group are those who are followed, and the second are those who follow them.

Therefore, this verse is of a similar meaning to the verse: *The faithful and their descendants who followed them in faith We will make their descendants join them, and We will not stint anything from the reward of their deeds* (52:21). However, the present verse is broader in scope and more inclusive because it mentions their forbears and their spouses, while the verse in Sūrah al-Ṭūr only mentions descendants. At the same time, the present verse says that *whoever is worthy* will join them in paradise, which is broader in scope than Sūrah al-Ṭūr, which makes this conditional upon faith (*īmān*).

Indeed You are the All-mighty, the All-wise: This explains the rationale for the angels supplication, beginning with *So forgive those who repent…* until the end of their plea (in other words, why God should do any of these things). At first glance, one might think it would have made more

sense for the angels to say Indeed you are the Oft-forgiving, the Most merciful. However, they say *You are the All-mighty, the All-wise* instead because of the attributes of God they praise at the outset of their supplication: *Our Lord! You encompass all things in mercy and knowledge*. God's all-encompassing mercy entails His limitless generosity; He can give whatever He wants to whomever He wants and withhold whatever He wants from whomever He wants. This is the meaning of might (*ʿizza*, from which derives *al-ʿAzīz* or the All-mighty), because might denotes the power to give and to withhold. At the same time, His knowledge encompassing all things means that it penetrates all dimensions of His actions, such that He is not ignorant or unaware about any aspect of them. This entails that whatever He does will be done in the best possible way, and that is the definition of wisdom (*ḥikma*, from which derives *al-Ḥakīm* or the All-wise).

Therefore, when the angels say *Indeed You are the All-mighty, the All-wise* they are, in fact, appealing to God's all-encompassing mercy and knowledge, which they invoke at the outset of their supplication as a prelude to asking their needs from Him, which is that He forgive the faithful and admit them to paradise.

وَقِهِمُ السَّيِّـَٔاتِ ۚ وَمَنْ تَقِ السَّيِّـَٔاتِ يَوْمَئِذٍ فَقَدْ رَحِمْتَهُ ۚ وَذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿٩﴾

(40:9) *Save them from the evils; and whomever You save from the ills that day, You will have had mercy upon him, and that is the great success.*

It appears that the *them* the angels are asking God to *save* refers both to those who repent and to those who are worthy.

The meaning of *the evils* (sayyiʾāt), according to some, is the consequences of their sins, meaning their just desserts. The reason why these consequences are called *evils* is because the recompense of evil is evil, as per the verse: *The requital of evil is an evil like it* (42:40).

Others have said that the meaning of *evils* is the sins and acts of disobedience themselves, while there is an implicit possessive construct at work in the sentence, which has the meaning of the recompense of *the evils* or the punishment of *the evils*.

This verse appears to be one of the passages in the Qur'an that indicates people are recompensed with their own actions, whether good or evil,

something which God repeats on a number of occasions. For example: *O faithless ones! Do not make any excuses today. You are only being requited for what you used to do* (66:7).

In any case, *the evils* that the angels ask God to protect the penitent and the worthy from are, ultimately, the terrors and hardships that will confront them on the Day of Resurrection rather than the punishment of hell itself. Therefore, there is no repetition when they also ask God in an earlier verse *and save them from the punishment of hell* (40:7).

Some have suggested that the meaning of *the evils* are the evil deeds as they exist in this world and *that day* refers to this world. Hence, the verse as a whole means: Protect them from falling into sin and committing misdeeds in this work by granting them success from You. However, the context of the verse strongly suggests that the meaning of *that day* is the Day of Resurrection, as previously the angels have asked God to *save them from the punishment of hell* and *admit them into the Gardens of Eden*. Therefore, the correct reading of this verse is that *evils* refers to the terrors and trials people will experience on the Day of Resurrection.

From these verses that relate the supplication of the angels to God on behalf of the faithful, the following becomes clear:

First, that the proper etiquette of supplication (*duʿāʾ*) is to begin by praising and glorifying God, followed by asking Him for ones needs, and then invoking the Beautiful Names of His most relevant for ones request to intercede on your behalf.

Second, that one should ask for forgiveness before one asks for paradise, as occurs on many occasions in God's speech when they are mentioned together. Upon reflection, this makes sense because in order for someone to receive a blessing they must have made themselves ready to receive it and removed any barriers to it.

Some have said that the passage *So forgive those who repent…* (40:7) shows that, when God spares someone punishment upon their repenting, this is done as a favour from Him as, were it necessary for God to spare the penitent person from punishment there would be no need to request this, because God would have done it anyway without doubt.

However, just because an action will definitely emanate from God, this does not in any way preclude someone from asking Him for it or seeking it from Him. This principle is clearly demonstrated in the passage that follows the angels plea for forgiveness on behalf of the penitent, when they say, *Our Lord! Admit them into the Gardens of Eden, which You have promised them*. Notice that they are asking God to grant the penitent paradise

while simultaneously acknowledging that God has already promised this to them, with the knowledge that God's promise will always be enacted, for God does not break His promises. Even more explicit than this verse is the verse quoting the words of the faithful: *Our Lord, give us what You have promised us through Your apostles, and do not disgrace us on the Day of Resurrection. Indeed You do not break Your promise* (3:194).

The acceptance of repentance is something that God has made obligatory upon Himself to do, and He has made it His duty to the penitent to forgive them: *repentance by Allah is only for those who commit evil out of ignorance, then repent promptly. It is such whose repentance Allah will accept…* (4:17). In fact, what asking God for something that He has imposed upon Himself, such as asking forgiveness for the penitent, really signifies is turning to Him in order to see that promise fulfilled and to show ones longing for the success that God's generosity brings.

Equally, just because God does something as an act of grace (*faḍl*), this does not entail that the act was not necessary in of itself. After all, all of God's gifts are acts of grace, whether they were definitely going to emanate from Him or not. This is because, even when an act necessarily emanates from Him, He is not compelled in this by some external agents influence upon Him, as He is the Agent that acts upon all other things and is not acted upon by anything else. In fact, He is the one who made the act necessary for Himself in the first place. Therefore, a necessary act is to be understood as a fixed divine decree (*qaḍāʾ ḥatm*) to perform some action or to pour out some gift on His servants. In this case, God is only acting in accordance with His will for His own self as an act of grace, not because He has been enjoined to do this by another being. Therefore, the act, while being necessary, is nevertheless a manifestation of His grace. Of course, were it not a necessary act in the first place, then its being an act of grace would be self-evident.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يُنَادَوْنَ لَمَقْتُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ مَقْتِكُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ إِذْ تُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى الْإِيمَانِ فَتَكْفُرُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

(40:10) *Indeed it will be proclaimed to the faithless: "Surely Allah's outrage is greater than your outrage towards yourselves, as you were invited to faith, but you disbelieved."*

'Outrage' (*maqt*) is the most intense form of hatred. Having discussed the faithful and some of what lies in store for them in the hereafter on

account of their faith, the conversation now returns to the disbelievers and some of what awaits them because of their denial.

The apparent meaning of this verse and the verse that follows it is that the proclamation directed to the faithless will take place in the hereafter but before they enter hellfire, where they will taste the punishment for their denial. There, it will become apparent to them that their denial in this world when they were called towards faith by the prophets was an outrage and an act of pure self-hatred, because this act has led them to suffer eternal devastation.

So they hear a proclamation from God, in which they are told: I swear that God's outrage and fury towards you is greater than your outrage with yourselves and your own self-loathing, for you were called to faith before by the prophets, but you disbelieved.

قَالُوا رَبَّنَا أَمَتَّنَا اثْنَتَيْنِ وَأَحْيَيْتَنَا اثْنَتَيْنِ فَاعْتَرَفْنَا بِذُنُوبِنَا فَهَلْ إِلَىٰ خُرُوجٍ مِنْ سَبِيلٍ ﴿١١﴾

(40:11) ***They will say, "Our Lord! Twice did You make us die, and twice did You give us life. We admit our sins. Is there any way out?"***

The context of this verse and the one preceding it suggests that they will say this after they have heard the aforementioned proclamation by God. What is more, they will be saying this while they are in hellfire, as evinced by their plea: *Is there any way out?*

Before making this request, the disbelievers first confess their own guilt, which is a form of begging and pleading with God to be saved from punishment, but it is too late for them. This is because when they were in this world, they were sceptical about the Resurrection and returning to God, so they denied it and forgot about the Day of Reckoning. And, because they forgot about the Day of Reckoning, they immersed themselves in all manner of sins and iniquities, as forgetting the Hereafter is the key to all sinfulness and error, as God said to David: *Indeed those who stray from the way of Allah there is a severe punishment for them because of their forgetting the Day of Reckoning* (38:26).

Then, God caused them to die once and to die again and gave them life once then gave them life again. This dispelled their doubts about the Resurrection and the return to God because they had seen life after death with their own eyes and experienced the afterlife first-hand, whereas previously they had believed that death was the end of all things and

would say that *There is nothing but our life of this world, and we shall not be resurrected* (6:29).

In short, their doubts have been dispelled because they now have complete certainty about the afterlife, but their sins and misdeeds still remain. Therefore, they plead with God to spare them from punishment by offering confessions. Sometimes, they confess because they now have certainty, as God relates: *Were you to see when the guilty hang their heads before their Lord, "Our Lord! We have seen and heard. Send us back so that we may act righteously. Indeed we are convinced"* (32:12). Other times, they confess their sins as we see in the present verse; previously, they had thought they were free to do as they pleased and to take whatever they wanted and that there would never be any accounting or reckoning or, indeed, any sins to answer for.

That is why they say, *We admit our sins* after *Twice did You make us die, and twice did You give us life*, because the confession of their sins follows from their newfound certainty about the reality of the Resurrection, which led them to realize that they had been astray from God's path in this world and immersed in error and sinfulness.

When they say, *Twice did You make us die, and twice did You give us life*, this means—according to some—their dying in this world, then their returning to life in Barzakh, then their second death in Barzakh, followed by their returning to life to be judged on the Day of Resurrection. Therefore, the verse is referring to God causing them to die at the end of their life in this world, then causing them to die after their life in Barzakh, as well as God giving them life in Barzakh and God giving them life on the Day of Resurrection. And without Barzakh, the reference to dying twice would not make any sense, because both dying and being brought to life depend on the occurrence of a prior opposite state.

But, if this is the case, why do they not refer to the life of this world and say, and three times did you give us life, insofar as they were given life after the death of non-existence through the imparting of a spirit to their physical form? The answer to this is that they are explaining how they became convinced about the Resurrection, which was through coming back to life in Barzakh and then again on the Day of Judgment. By contrast, their being given life in this world did not lead them to become convinced about the Resurrection, as they were in doubt about the Resurrection so long as they were alive in this world.

Based on the above explanation, it is easy to see why the following is incorrect: Some argue that if *and twice did You give us life* referred to

Barzakh and the Hereafter (as opposed to this world and the Hereafter), they should have said, you caused us to die twice and gave us life three times, as the purpose of this is nothing other than to describe the course of their existence, which consists of two deaths and three lives.

The answer to this argument is that this is not their intention at all. On the contrary, they are explaining how they came to be convinced about the Resurrection, and their worldly life is not part of that story.

Some have said that the first death refers to the embryo before the spirit has entered the body, and the first life refers to the human being after this has happened. Then, the second death refers to the death of this world, and the second life begins with the Resurrection on the Day of Judgment. This corresponds to the verse: *How can you be unfaithful to Allah? You were lifeless and He gave you life, then He will make you die, and then He shall bring you to life…* (2:28).

However, when it is pointed out to them that you cannot say that God caused them to die prior to the spirit entering the body, because this would imply a prior state of being alive, they resort to all manner of intellectual gymnastics to prop up this reading. For those interested in reading more about this, let them refer to *Tafsīr al-kashshāf* and its commentaries.

In any case, as we have already established, the disbelievers mention dying and being returned to life in order to explain how they came to be convinced of the Resurrection, and their worldly life and any state of death that could be said to have come before it have no relevance to this.

Others have argued that the first life is their life in this world and the second life is their life in the grave, while the first death is in this world and the second is in the grave, and this verse does not speak about the life that follows the Resurrection. This reading is to be rejected on the basis of what has already been said, namely that the life of this world has nothing to do with the purpose of the verse, therefore there is no need to include it, while the life that follows the Resurrection is directly relevant to it.

Others still have said that the meaning of the two lives refers to the afterlife and the life before it. They further argue that the afterlife is divided into two stages: the life in the grave and the life that follows the Resurrection, and that, therefore, even though the verse does not explicitly mention it, the verse includes the three lives (of this world, the grave, and the Resurrection) and the two deaths altogether.

However, this reading is to be rejected for the same reasons as the previous two, in addition to the fact that the verse explicitly refers to the second death that takes place in the grave and, so, does pay attention to

the two stages of the afterlife. Therefore, the two lives and two deaths refer to specific instances, rather than species, of each.

Others have argued that the first life refers to the souls in the World of Pre-existence (*ʿālam al-dharr*), followed by death, followed by life in this world, followed by death in this world, followed by life in the Hereafter. However, this reading is to be rejected on the same basis as those above.

Some have argued that the number two here signifies repetition, as with the verse: *Look again, once more* (67:4), in other words the verse means: You have caused us to die and brought us to life time and again.

However, this would only make sense if the disbelievers had said, Two deaths did You make us die, two lives did You give us life—using the dual form for deaths and lives—or used the phrase again (*karratayn*). However, the verse uses the number two (*ithnatayn*) as an adjective, suggesting that this is to be taken literally, as in the verse: *Do not worship two Allahs* (16:51).

As for their saying, *Is there any way out?*, this is a supplication and a plea in the form of a question. The fact that they say *any way* (in Arabic, both *khurūj* and *sabīl* are indefinite) shows that they are so desperate that they will accept any means of escape, no matter what it entails. This is because they have done their utmost and exhausted all other possibilities for escape, so they know that they have no hope of salvation except through God.

ذَٰلِكُمْ بِأَنَّهُ إِذَا دُعِيَ اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ كَفَرْتُمْ ۖ وَإِنْ يُشْرَكْ بِهِ تُؤْمِنُوا ۚ فَالْحُكْمُ لِلَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ الْكَبِيرِ ﴿١٢﴾

(40:12) *This is because, when Allah was invoked alone, you would disbelieve, but if partners were ascribed to Him you would believe. So the Judgment belongs to Allah, the All-exalted, the All-great.*

This is a rebuke delivered to the disbelievers on the Day of Resurrection, although it is also possible that it could be delivered to them in this world in order to dissuade them from associating partners with God.

This refers to the tribulation they will face in the Hereafter. The phrase *but if partners were ascribed to him…* suggests that this is something they did continuously. This context of this verse is that it offers an explanation for their obstinate rejection of the truth and their hostility towards monotheism. They disbelieve in anything that even remotely suggests God's unity, while believing anything that supports idolatry. They do not observe any of their duties towards God, nor do they show Him any

respect, therefore God denies them His mercy and shows them no leniency in His verdict against them.

It is in this way that the first part of the verse relates to its coda and leads up to it: *So the Judgment belongs to Allah, the All-exalted, the All-great.* It is as if to say: You cut yourselves off from God and denied everything He wanted you to believe in, while simultaneously believing in everything He detested. So, now, He will cut you off from His mercy and judge you without leniency.

Therefore, the verse is similar in its meaning to *They have forgotten Allah, so He has forgotten them* (9:67), while the sentence *So the Judgment belongs to Allah, the All-exalted, the All-great* has a meaning specific to this context, even if it could be taken as a general statement in of itself. However, in this context, it delivers a warning to the disbelievers and emphasizes this warning by invoking the two divine names of *the All-exalted, the All-great*.

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Verses 13 to 20

Having divided humankind into those who return to God and follow his way and those who deny his signs and resort to falsehoods, the present verses argue for God's unity and deliver a warning to their audience.

هُوَ الَّذِی یُرِیکُمْ آیَاتِهِ وَیُنَزِّلُ لَکُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ رِزْقًا ۚ وَمَا یَتَذَکَّرُ إِلَّا مَنْ یُنِیبُ ﴿١٣﴾

(40:13) ***It is He who shows you His signs and sends down for you provision from the heavens. Yet no one takes admonition except him who returns penitently.***

The meaning of *signs* (*āyāt*) here are those indications and proofs of God's oneness in both lordship and divinity, as shown by the beginning of the following verse. *So supplicate Allah, putting exclusive faith in Him…*, which presents itself as the logical corollary of being shown these signs. The term *signs* is also used in a general sense and includes both the signs visible in the natural world to any person of good sense, the signs brought by the divine messengers, and the proofs established by way of divine revelation.

This verse also contains the following argument: If there was a deity whose worship was incumbent for the human being, and this worship was a source of flourishing and felicity for the human being, then it would be obligatory for this deity—because of His perfect governance of the cosmos and complete concern for the human being—to guide the human being towards this worship. And the one to whose lordship and divinity all the signs of the cosmos point, and in this they are supported by the miracles and preaching of the prophets and the messengers, is the One God. As for the deities that the idolaters worship besides God, they have no sign indicating any of this for themselves. Therefore, it is God alone who is the deity worthy of worship. It is to this fact that Imām ʿAlī alluded with the words: If your Lord had a partner, this partners messengers would have come to you as well.

…and sends down for you provision from the heavens: This is another proof for God's oneness by way of provision, as providing for the denizens of the earth is one of the functions of lordship and divinity, but provision

is from God and not from His supposed partners. Therefore, He is the lord and the god, not them.

Provision (rizq) here has been understood as a reference to rain, while *the heavens* (samāʾ) is taken as a reference to the terrestrial sky. However, *provision* could also mean the things themselves from which humans take provision and the descent of these things from *the heavens* could mean their emergence into the visible realm from the unseen one, as suggested by the verse: *There is not a thing but that its sources are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure* (15:21).

Yet no one takes admonition except him who returns penitently: This is an interjection that indicates that only one of the two groups of humans mentioned above takes a lesson from these signs, and it is the group who turn penitently to God rather than those who reject and argue obstinately. This is because disbelief and rejection remove a persons ability to take a lesson from proofs or follow the truth.

فَادْعُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

(40:14) ***So supplicate Allah, putting exclusive faith in Him, though the faithless should be averse.***

Based on the context, the most appropriate reading of this is that it is directed to everyone, whether a believer or not, based on the proofs laid out in the previous verse. However, it does not include the disbelievers mentioned at the end of itself, who are the ones who deny and argue with the Messenger through recourse to falsehood.

It is as though God means to say: Insofar as these signs demonstrate God's oneness, and He alone is the sender of provision, then aside from those disbelievers who deny and debate, everyone should supplicate to God and dedicate their religion to Him. As for the disbelievers who detest the idea of divine unity, there is no hope for them, no sign will avail them, and no proof will convince them. So, you worship God and devote your faith to Him and let the faithless detest that if they wish.

رَفِيعُ الدَّرَجَاتِ ذُو الْعَرْشِ يُلْقِي الرُّوحَ مِنْ أَمْرِهِ عَلَىٰ مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ لِيُنْذِرَ يَوْمَ التَّلَاقِ ﴿١٥﴾

(40:15) ***Raiser of ranks, Lord of the Throne, He casts the Spirit of His command upon whomever of His servants that He wishes, that he may warn of the Day of Meeting.***

These are three attributes of God, each of which grammatically takes the form of a series of predicates for the pronoun in the previous verse: *It is He who shows you His signs…* and this verse and those that follow it are in the context of a warning.

A number of interpretations have been offered for the phrase *rafīʿ al-darajāt* (Raiser of ranks). For example, that it means the one who raises the ranks of the Prophets and God's allies in paradise. Some have said it means the one who raises the seven heavens through which the angels ascend to the throne. Others have argued it means the one who raised the supports of the throne. Finally, there are those who say it means that God is the one who is raised in rank, status, and authority.

Reflecting on the meaning of this verse and the one after it, they appear to be concerned with describing God's sovereignty and dominion over His creation by saying that He has a throne in which are gathered all the reins of power and from which descends His commands, and that this throne is elevated to the loftiest ranks of His creation. These ranks are, perhaps, a reference to the heavens that He describes as the abodes of the angels; His command descends through these ranks, and it is these heavens that veil his throne from humankind.

Then, there will be a Day of Convergence, in which this veil that separates the throne from humankind will be pulled back such that their sights can penetrate the depths of the heavens and His throne will become visible for them. Whereat, it will be clear to them that He is the sovereign over all things, and there is no dominion except His, which allows Him to judge between people.

Therefore, the meaning of *darajāt* (ranks) here are the levels through which one ascends to His throne and through which one returns from it. Therefore *Raiser of ranks, Lord of the Throne* is an allusion to how exalted the Throne of His dominion is above the level of His creation, to the extent that it is hidden and veiled from them until the Day of Judgment by lofty ranks and distant intervals.

He casts the Spirit of His command upon whomever of His servants that He wishes: This refers to the matter of prophethood, one of whose functions is to warn others. He qualifies the word *rūḥ* (Spirit) with *of His command* to show that *Spirit* here refers to the same spirit mentioned in the verse, *The Spirit is of the command of my Lord* (17:85), which is what accompanies the angels of revelation as they descend, as per the verse: *He sends down the angels with the Spirit of His command to whomever He wishes of His servants…* (16:2).

The meaning of *casts the Spirit… upon whomever of His servants that He wishes…* means that He sends it down to them with the angels of revelation. *Whomever of His servants that He wishes* is a reference to the Prophets and Messengers whom He chose to carry His message to mankind. There are other theories with reference to this idea of a spirit cast upon the Prophet, but these do not concern us here.

…that he may warn of the Day of Meeting: This is the Day of Resurrection; it is called a *meeting* because it represents the meeting of all of God's creatures together, or the meeting of the Creator and His creation, or the meeting of the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth, or the meeting of the oppressor and the oppressed, or the meeting of a person and their deeds. All of these meanings have been suggested by different commentators.

The second of these meanings can be supported by the repeated references the Qur'an contains to the Day of Judgment as an meeting (*liqāʾ*). For example: *Indeed many of the people disbelieve in the meeting with their Lord* (30:8), *Indeed they will encounter their Lord* (11:29), and *O man! You are labouring toward your Lord laboriously, and you will meet Him* (84:6). This is called a meeting because it represents the severing of the human being from all distractions, so that it becomes self-evident that God is the Manifest Truth, and because they will go forth from their graves to Him.

يَوْمَ هُمْ بَارِزُونَ ۖ لَا يَخْفَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ مِنْهُمْ شَيْءٌ ۚ لِمَنِ الْمُلْكُ الْيَوْمَ ۖ لِلَّهِ الْوَاحِدِ الْقَهَّارِ ﴿١٦﴾

(40:16) ***The day when they will emerge, nothing about them will be hidden from Allah. To whom does the sovereignty belong today? To Allah, the One, the All-dominant!***

This is an explanation of *the Day of Meeting*, and when the verse says *they will emerge* it means that the truth will become apparent to them and all of their imagined bonds will be removed—the same bonds that led them astray, veiled their Lord from them, and made them forget that His sovereignty is all-encompassing, that Judgment alone belongs to Him, and that lordship and divinity belong to Him alone.

The day when they will emerge refers to the removal of every bond and every veil that prevented them from recognizing the truth.

…nothing about them will be hidden from Allah: This explains the meaning of their emerging. In short, their hearts and deeds will be clearly

visible to God; their inner and outer beings, whatever they remember and whatever they have forgotten—all will be unveiled and plain to see.

To whom does the sovereignty belong today? To Allah, the One, the All-paramount! The question and the answer both emanate from God and make clear the reality of the Day, which is the manifestation of God's sovereignty and authority over the entirety of creation.

God is described with the attributes of *the One* (al-Wāḥid) and *the All-dominant* (al-Qahhār) to show why sovereignty belongs to Him alone. To dominate a thing is to have sovereignty and authority over it by depriving it of its independence. Equally, He is the One, and therefore this sovereignty belongs to Him alone.

الْيَوْمَ تُجْزَىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ ۚ لَا ظُلْمَ الْيَوْمَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ ﴿١٧﴾

(40:17) ***Today every soul shall be requited for what it has earned. There will be no injustice today. Indeed Allah is swift at reckoning.***

This verse explains the significance of the Day, namely that each soul will be requited with exactly what it has earned; its recompense will be its own deeds. God says: *O faithless ones! Do not make any excuses today. You are only being requited what you used to do* (66:7).

When God says, *Indeed Allah is swift at reckoning*, this explains why there will be no injustice (*ẓulm*) on that Day, namely that God is swift in reckoning, meaning that judging one soul does not distract Him from judging another at the same time, such that He might err and recompense a soul with other than what it has earned and, in doing so, commit an injustice against it.

This explanation intends to negate any injustice that emanates from an error. As for the kind of injustice that is done knowingly and wilfully, this is also precluded by the fact that each soul will be requited with the same deeds it has done, and this cannot be conceived of as unjust or unfair.

وَأَنْذِرْهُمْ يَوْمَ الْآزِفَةِ إِذِ الْقُلُوبُ لَدَى الْحَنَاجِرِ كَاظِمِينَ ۚ مَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ حَمِيمٍ وَلَا شَفِيعٍ يُطَاعُ ﴿١٨﴾

(40:18) ***Warn them of the Imminent Day when the hearts will be at the throats, choking with suppressed agony.***

Throats (pl. *ḥanājir*, sing. *ḥanjara*) refers to the epiglottis, which is located at the back of the mouth. Saying *the hearts will be at the throats* is a figure of speech that is meant to show extreme fear (akin to the English expression: my heart is in my mouth), as though the heart has leapt up from its place and reached the back of the throat out of fright. *Choking with suppressed agony* (kāẓimīn) refers to extreme grief.

The wrongdoers will have no sympathizer, nor any intercessor who might be heard—A sympathizer (*ḥamīm*) is a close associate who will come to your aid because of their relationship with you. God says elsewhere: *there will be no ties between them on that day* (23:101). Nor will there be any intercessor whose request for intercession will be heeded.

يَعْلَمُ خَائِنَةَ الْأَعْيُنِ وَمَا تُخْفِي الصُّدُورُ ﴿١٩﴾

(40:19) *He knows the treachery of the eyes, and what the breasts hide.*

Some have said that *khāʾina* (translated as treachery here) is an infinitive (*maṣdar*) akin to *khiyāna* (same meaning), in the same way as *kādhiba* is used for *kadhb* (both meaning deception) and *lāghiya* for *lughuww* (both meaning vain).

Treachery of the eyes… does not refer to just any sin committed by the eyes, but rather those sins of the eyes that are hidden from others—like a stolen glance—because this is mentioned alongside *what the breasts hide* to illustrate God's total knowledge.

It is said that the Arabic phrase *khāʾinat al-ʿyun* (treachery of the eyes) is a possessive construct in which the adjective is associated with its noun, which would render the meaning He knows the treacherous eyes. However, the previous meaning is more apposite.

…and what the breasts hide: What the soul keeps secret and hidden, such as disbelief, hypocrisy, and sinful thoughts.

وَاللَّهُ يَقْضِي بِالْحَقِّ ۖ وَالَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ لَا يَقْضُونَ بِشَيْءٍ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ ﴿٢٠﴾

(40:20) *Allah judges with justice, while those whom they invoke besides Him do not judge by anything. Indeed it is Allah who is the All-hearing, the All-seeing.*

This is another proof of His oneness in divinity, which He lays out

after discussing how sovereignty belongs to Him alone on the Day of Judgment and how He knows the treachery of the eyes and what the breasts hide, where these two points serve as a preliminary for this one.

The summation of the proof is as follows: It is a necessary requirement of divinity that a deity judges his servants and judges between them; God is the one who judges the creation and judges between them on the Day of Resurrection. On the other hand, those whom the idolaters invoke beside God do not judge anything, because they are also servants and subjects of God without any sovereignty of their own.

Part of God's Judgment (*qaḍāʾ*) is His governing the particular affairs of His servants through creation upon creation, as this too is an example of Judgment and decree. God says: *All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it "Be," and it is* (36:82) and *When He decides on a matter He just says to it "Be!" and it is* (3:47). No other deity has any share in creation. Therefore, no other deity has any share in Judgment.

Another part of God's Judgment is His promulgation of the religion and His choosing it as a means to reach Him, as He says: *Your Lord has decreed that you shall not worship anyone except Him* (17:23).

Indeed it is Allah who is the All-hearing, the All-seeing: In other words, He possesses the true knowledge of all objects of hearing and objects of sight by virtue of His own divine essence. No one else has access to this save those whom God endows with these senses and grants permission to use them. No one has them innately.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, regarding the verse *He casts the Spirit of His command upon whomever of His servants that He wishes* (40:15), we read: It is the Holy Spirit (*Rūḥ al-Qudus*), which is exclusively for God's Messenger and the Imāms.

(2) In *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq narrates via a chain of narrators from Ḥafṣ b. Ghiyāth, from Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]: *The Day of Meeting* is the day on which the inhabitants of the heavens and the inhabitants of the earth will meet.

Author's comments: The same tradition is transmitted in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* with an incomplete chain of narrators.

(3) In *al-Tawḥīd*, al-Ṣadūq narrates via a chain of narrators from Ibn Faḍḍāl, from [Imām] al-Riḍā, from his forefathers, from ʿAlī, a tradition in which he said: God says "*To whom does the sovereignty belong today?*" Then the spirits of His prophets, messengers,

and representatives say: "*To Allah, the One, the All-dominant!*" Then God says: "*Today every soul shall be requited for what it has earned.*"

(4) In *Nahj al-balāgha*, we read: Surely, after the extinction of the world, God the Glorified will remain alone with nothing else beside Him. He will be, after its extinction, as He was before its origination: without time, or place, or moment, or duration. At this moment, duration and time will not exist, and the years and the hours will disappear. There will be nothing except God, the One, the All-dominant. To Him is the return of all matters. The worlds origination was not in its own power, and the prevention of its extinction was also not in its power. For, if it had the power to prevent it, it would have existed for ever.

(5) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is narrated via a chain of narrators from Thuwayr b. Abī Fākhita, that [Imām] ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn was asked about the two soundings of the Trumpet, how much time would elapse between them? He answered: As much as He wills. Then he described how the Trumpets would be sounded and the death of the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth, before saying: They will remain in that state for as long as God wills. Then, He will command the heavens and they will be set whirling, then He will command the mountains and they will be set moving, and this is His saying: "*On the day when the sky whirls violently, and the mountains move with an awful motion*" (52:9–10)—meaning that they will expand—"*The day the earth is transformed into another earth*" (14:48)—meaning an earth on which no sins have been earned will emerge, without mountains or vegetation, as it was when He unfurled it for the first time. His Throne will return to the waters as it was the first time, absolute in His tremendousness and power. Then, he said: Whereat He will call the mountains with a great shout that will be heard throughout the heavens and the earths: "*To whom does the sovereignty belong today?*" And no one will answer Him. Then, the Almighty will answer Himself: "*To Allah, the One, the All-dominant!*"

Author's comments: Reflecting on the last three verses suggests that what will be extinguished from creation is the independence of its being and the bonds and connections of causality that existed between its parts. This is what the Qurʾānic verses suggest. The spirits will not die, and there is no time between the two soundings of the Trumpet, so they will not

be neglected. These narrations contain many subtle points that will be apparent to one who contemplates on them. However, they also contain some details that run contrary to the apparent meanings of the verses.

(6) In *Rawḍat al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates via a chain of narrators from Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, from [Imām] Mūsā b. Jaʿfar a tradition, in which he says: O Abū Aḥmad, no believer commits a sin except that it distresses him and he regrets it. The Prophet has said: "Regret is repentance enough." And he said: "Whoever is gladdened by his good deeds and grieved by his bad ones is a believer." So, if he does not regret the sin he has committed, he is not a believer, and no intercession will be granted on his account, and he is a wrongdoer. God says: "*The wrongdoers will have no sympathizer, nor any intercessor who might be heard*" (40:18).

(7) In *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq narrates via a chain of narrators from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Salama al-Ḥarīrī, who said: I asked Abū ʿAbd Allāh about the verse "*He knows the treachery of the eyes*" (40:19). He told me: "Do you not see that a man will look at a thing without showing that he is looking at it? That is the treachery of the eyes."

(8) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī narrates from Abū Dāwūd, al-Nasāʾī, and Ibn Mardawayh from Saʿd, who said: On the day of Meccas conquest, God's Messenger granted safety to the people, except for four men and two women. He said: "Kill them, even if you find them clinging to the Kaʿba!" One of them was ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd b. Abī Sarḥ, who sought refuge with ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān. So, when God's Messenger called people to pledge allegiance to him, ʿUthmān brought him to the Prophet and said: "O Messenger of God, let ʿAbd Allāh pledge allegiance"—three times he refused and, each time, ʿUthmān asked again—so he received the pledge of allegiance from him, then turned to his Companions and said: "Was there not any man of good sense amongst you who could see I was refusing his pledge of allegiance and might have killed him?" They said: "We did not know, O Messenger of God, what you had in mind—would you not have given us a sign with your eyes?" He said: "It does not befit a prophet to have treachery of the eyes (*khāʾinat al-aʿyun*)."

Verses 21 to 54

These verses admonish the disbelievers to examine the ruins of past nations and consider their stories to draw a moral lesson for themselves, that they might know that no matter how great or powerful a people might be and no matter how well they plan, no one can thwart God. The verses then present part of the story of Moses and Pharaoh as an example of this, and they include the story of the believer in Pharaoh's household.

أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ ۚ كَانُوا هُمْ أَشَدَّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَآثَارًا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَأَخَذَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَمَا كَانَ لَهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ وَاقٍ ﴿٢١﴾

(40:21) ***Have they not travelled over the land so that they may observe how was the fate of those who were before them? They were greater than them in might and with respect to the traces they left behind in the land. But then Allah seized them for their sins, and they had no defender against Allah?***

This is a rhetorical question intended as a rebuke to the disbelievers; *wāqin* (defender) is the active participle of *wiqāya*, meaning to protect something from harm.

The meaning of the verse is: Have those to whom we sent you not travelled *over the land so that they may observe*—and, in doing so, reflect and draw a lesson— *how was the fate of those who were before them?*—those nations who rejected their messengers and were destroyed as a result—*They were greater than them in might*—in their power and authority—*and with respect to the traces they left behind*—such as the fortified cities, impregnable fortresses, and lofty palaces—*in the land. But then Allah seized them for their sins*—and destroyed them for their misdeeds—*and they had no defender against Allah* who could protect them from His punishment.

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانَتْ تَأْتِيهِمْ رُسُلُهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَكَفَرُوا فَأَخَذَهُمُ اللَّهُ ۚ إِنَّهُ قَوِيٌّ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ ﴿٢٢﴾

(40:22) ***That was because their messengers used to bring them clear signs, but they defied [them]. So Allah seized them. Indeed He is all-strong, severe in retribution.***

That here refers to the divine punishment mentioned in the previous verse, and *clear signs* (bayyināt) refers to manifest proofs. The remainder is clear.

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وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَىٰ بِآيَاتِنَا وَسُلْطَانٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٢٣﴾

(40:23) ***Certainly We sent Moses with Our signs and a manifest authority,***

Perhaps what is meant by *āyāt* (signs) here are the miracles and wonders with which these he was sent, such as his staff transforming into a serpent or his hand glowing white, and by *sulṭān mubīn* (manifest authority) the absolute divine power with which they were supported, such as that which prevented Pharaoh from killing Moses and extinguishing the light of his guidance. Some have said that *signs* means proofs and evidences, while *manifest authority* refers to the miracles, such as Moses staff or hand and so on. And other meanings have been suggested besides this.

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إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَهَامَانَ وَقَارُونَ فَقَالُوا سَاحِرٌ كَذَّابٌ ﴿٢٤﴾

(40:24) ***to Pharaoh, Haman and Korah, but they said, "A magician, a mendacious liar."***

Pharaoh was the tyrannical ruler of the Egyptians and the enslaver of the Israelites, while Haman was his advisor, and Korah was a wrongdoer from the Israelites who had abundant sources of wealth. God singles out these three individuals for mention from both peoples because they were the leaders from whom all of the corruption and sinfulness of these two peoples emanated.

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فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ بِالْحَقِّ مِنْ عِنْدِنَا قَالُوا اقْتُلُوا أَبْنَاءَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ وَاسْتَحْيُوا نِسَاءَهُمْ ۚ وَمَا كَيْدُ الْكَافِرِينَ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ ﴿٢٥﴾

(40:25) ***So when he brought them the truth from Us, they said, Kill the sons of the faithful who are with him, and spare their women. But the stratagems of the faithless only go awry.***

This verse draws a contrast between the message Moses brought them and the values he called them to and between how they responded to him with their plotting. He had brought them the truth and they should have accepted it because it was the truth and because he had brought them it from God. They should have accepted it and not rejected it, but, instead, they responded by plotting against him, and they made these plans lest anyone should believe in him. However, God caused their plans to go awry and they were not able to harm the faithful who were with him.

The context suggests that one of those who said these words was Korah, who was an Israelite himself. This is not unlikely, because the order to kill the sons and spare the womenfolk of the Israelites had been given by the Pharaoh's before Moses prophetic mission had begun, whereas in this verse it concerns specifically the sons and womenfolk of those who believed in Moses. Perhaps Korahs interests aligned with those of Pharaoh and Haman because of his enmity and hostility towards Moses and those of his people who followed him.

Note that they say *the faithful who are with him* rather than simply the faithful as a whole, which shows that they were supporting him in his mission.

وَقَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ ذَرُونِي أَقْتُلْ مُوسَىٰ وَلْيَدْعُ رَبَّهُ ۖ إِنِّي أَخَافُ أَنْ يُبَدِّلَ دِينَكُمْ أَوْ أَنْ يُظْهِرَ فِي الْأَرْضِ الْفَسَادَ ﴿٢٦﴾

(40:26) ***And Pharaoh said, Let me slay Moses, and let him invoke his Lord. Indeed I fear that he will change your religion, or bring forth corruption in the land.***

Here, Pharaoh addresses his elites. This verse indicates that there were a group of people advising him not to kill Moses and to leave him alone, as also evinced by the verse: *They said, "Put him and his brother off for a while"* (26:36).

Pharaoh says *and let him invoke his Lord* out of arrogance and insolence. He means: Let me kill him and let him pray to his Lord to save him from me and preserve his life if he is able!

…Indeed I fear that he will change your religion, or bring forth corruption in the land: In this passage, Pharaoh explains the rationale behind his decision to kill Moses, saying that on the one hand he is afraid for his peoples religion and on the other that he is afraid for the worldly affairs. With regard to his fear for their religion—which was a form of idolatry—he

is worried Moses will turn them to the worship of the One God, and as regards their worldly affairs, he sees that Moses is amassing followers and influence and that they may launch a rebellion against Pharaoh, which will lead to violence and a breakdown of peace and security in the land.

وَقَالَ مُوسَىٰ إِنِّي عُذْتُ بِرَبِّي وَرَبِّكُمْ مِنْ كُلِّ مُتَكَبِّرٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُ بِيَوْمِ الْحِسَابِ ﴿٢٧﴾

(40:27) ***Moses said: "Indeed I seek the protection of my Lord and your Lord from every arrogant one who does not believe in the Day of Reckoning."***

See how Moses responds to Pharaoh's threats to kill him by seeking God's protection. His saying *Indeed I seek the protection of my Lord and your Lord* stands in stark contrast to Pharaoh's remark to *let him invoke his Lord*, for Pharaoh identifies God as Moses Lord alone, whereas Moses says that God is the Lord of Pharaoh and his people as surely as He is the Lord of Moses and that God's authority extends over them as much as it does him, such that he can seek God's protection against their evil and this protection will be effective.

Based on this, it is clear that the phrase *your Lord* refers to Pharaoh and his people rather than Moses own people, the Israelites.

…from every arrogant one who does not believe in the Day of Reckoning: This refers to Pharaoh and those who share his arrogance and lack of faith in the Day of Reckoning. It shows that no one is safe from anyone who possesses these two evil traits in their character.

وَقَالَ رَجُلٌ مُؤْمِنٌ مِنْ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَكْتُمُ إِيمَانَهُ أَتَقْتُلُونَ رَجُلًا أَنْ يَقُولَ رَبِّيَ اللَّهُ وَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ ۖ وَإِنْ يَكُ كَاذِبًا فَعَلَيْهِ كَذِبُهُ ۖ وَإِنْ يَكُ صَادِقًا يُصِبْكُمْ بَعْضُ الَّذِي يَعِدُكُمْ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي مَنْ هُوَ مُسْرِفٌ كَذَّابٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

(40:28) ***Said a man of faith from Pharaoh's clan, who concealed his faith, Will you kill a man for saying, "My Lord is Allah, while he has already brought you manifest proofs from your Lord? Should he be lying, his falsehood will be to his own detriment; but if he is truthful, there shall visit you some of what he promises you. Indeed Allah does not guide someone who is a profligate, a liar.***

From the context, it appears that 'from Pharaohs clan' (*min āl Firʿawn*) is an adjective for *a man*, and the verbal sentence 'who concealed his faith' (*yaktum īmānahu*) functions as a second adjective for it. Therefore, this man was an Egyptian from the family of Pharaoh, and his family did not know that he believed in Moses because he had kept his faith hidden from them.

It is said that *from Pharaohs clan* is actually the second object of the verb *concealed* (meaning that he *concealed his faith… from Pharaohs clan*) and that this object was placed in front of the verb. As for the verb *conceal* itself, it can take two direct objects, as in 'and they will not conceal any matter from Allah' (*wa lā yaktumūn Allāha ḥadīthan*—note that in the Arabic, there is no need to insert the preposition from in front of God, even though that is the meaning) or it can take an object using the preposition from (*min*, which is used in this verse), as has been stated in the *Miṣbāḥ*.

However, the problem with this reading is that it does not align with the context of the verse and there is no apparent reason why the object of the verb should be placed in front of it, such as signifying exclusivity (as in he *only* concealed his faith from Pharaoh's clan) or the like. Furthermore, the man repeatedly addresses Pharaoh and his people with the expression *O my people!* (yā qawmi), and if he was not a member of Pharaoh's clan (as indicated by treating *from Pharaohs clan* as an adjective of *man* rather than the second object of the verb *concealed*) then he could not address them thusly.

Will you kill a man for saying, My Lord is Allah, while he has already brought you manifest proofs from your Lord? Here, the believer of Pharaoh's family rebukes them for deciding to kill Moses. The fact that he says *from your Lord* shows that the *manifest proofs* (bayyināt) Moses brought concerned the fact that God was as much their Lord as Moses' and that, therefore, to kill him would be to kill someone who brought them the truth from their Lord.

Should he be lying, his falsehood will be to his own detriment: Some commentators have pointed out that he only says this to conciliate his own people; it does not mean that he personally doubted the veracity of Moses' claims to be a prophet.

…but if he is truthful, there shall visit you some of what he promises you: Again, this shows that the man is being conciliatory by only invoking the minimum standards, as if to say: If Moses is telling the truth, then you will suffer at least some of the punishments that he foretold, although if

he is truthful it is more likely that you will suffer all of them.

…Indeed Allah does not guide someone who is a profligate, a liar: This explains the rationale behind the second part of his argument, as if to say: if Moses is lying, then his own deceit will be sufficiently detrimental to him, but if he is telling the truth you will suffer at least some of the punishments with which he has threatened you. This is because you will have gone beyond the bounds by killing him, denying the lordship of your Lord, and taking lords besides God, and God does not guide someone who is a profligate or a liar. And, in the event that Moses is lying, then the one he claims as His lord has no lordship in order to guide him or to leave him without guidance.

Based on this, it should be evident why what some scholars have said about this part of the verse serving as a justification for both of his statements together (that Moses has brought proofs from their Lord *and* that whether he is lying or not he should not be killed) is not correct.

يَا قَوْمِ لَكُمُ الْمُلْكُ الْيَوْمَ ظَاهِرِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَمَنْ يَنْصُرُنَا مِنْ بَأْسِ اللَّهِ إِنْ جَاءَنَا ۚ قَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ مَا أُرِيكُمْ إِلَّا مَا أَرَىٰ وَمَا أَهْدِيكُمْ إِلَّا سَبِيلَ الرَّشَادِ ﴿٢٩﴾

(40:29) ***O my people! Today sovereignty belongs to you, and you are dominant in the land. But who will save us from Allah's violence should it overtake us? Pharaoh said: I just point out to you what I see [to be advisable for you], and I guide you only to the way of rectitude.***

This is another rhetorical question intended as a rebuke. *Dominant in the land* means that they enjoy power and supremacy in the land of Egypt; *Allah's violence* is His punishment.

In this verse, the believer asks: 'O my people! Today you have sovereignty while you have power and supremacy in the land of Egypt over those who are beneath you, such as the Israelites, but who will help us against the divine punishment with which Moses threatens us?' Notice that he includes himself amongst their number when he speaks of God's punishment, as this is a more eloquent and persuasive form of delivering advice as it implies that he wishes to save them just as much as he wants to save himself.

Pharaoh said: "I just point out to you what I see, and I guide you only to the way of rectitude": In other words, he only points out to them the best

course of action in accordance with reality. By this, he means that he is certain about what he guides his people to do in response to Moses, as if it is something that is self-evident to him because it corresponds with objective reality. In fact, this is merely him feigning confidence to his people.

وَقَالَ الَّذِى آمَنَ يَا قَوْمِ إِنِّى أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ مِثْلَ يَوْمِ الْأَحْزَابِ ﴿٣٠﴾ مِثْلَ دَأْبِ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَعَادٍ وَثَمُودَ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ ۚ وَمَا اللَّهُ يُرِيدُ ظُلْمًا لِلْعِبَادِ ﴿٣١﴾

(40:30–31) ***And he who had faith said: "O my people! Indeed I fear for you the like of the day of the factions, like the case of the people of Noah, of ʿĀd and Thamūd, and those who were after them, and Allah does not desire any wrong for the servants."***

He who had faith refers to the believer of Pharaoh's clan, it is not—as some have suggested—Moses, on account of his eloquence. *The factions* are the nations mentioned in the subsequent verse: the peoples of Noah, ʿĀd, and Thamūd, and those who came after them. The sentence *the case of the people of Noah…* is an elaboration of *the like of* in the previous verse, and *case* (daʾb) refers to a habit or precedent.

In other words, he tells his audience: 'O my people! I am afraid that you will suffer the same fate as earlier peoples, like the example that was made of them one after another because of their disbelief in and denial of the messengers, *or* like the requital they suffered because of their continuous habit of disbelief and denial, but God does not will any wrong to befall His servants.'

وَيَا قَوْمِ إِنِّى أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ يَوْمَ التَّنَادِ ﴿٣٢﴾ يَوْمَ تُوَلُّونَ مُدْبِرِينَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ عَاصِمٍ ۗ وَمَنْ يُضْلِلِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ هَادٍ ﴿٣٣﴾

(40:32–33) ***O my people! Indeed I fear for you a day of mutual calls, a day when you will turn back, not having anyone to protect you from Allah, and whomever Allah leads astray has no guide.***

A day of mutual calls is the Day of Resurrection, and perhaps he refers to it as this because on that day the wrongdoers will call out to one another for aid and call out to one another in distress and grief, as they would in this world.

Some have said the meaning of *mutual calls* is the calls exchanged

between the inhabitants of paradise and the inmates of hell, as per the description given by God in Sūrah al-Aʿrāf. Commentators have suggested other meanings of this, but they are not worthy of mention here.

A day when you turn back, not having anyone to protect you from Allah: Again, referring to the Day of Resurrection, and perhaps it means that they run away while they are in hell because of the severity of their punishment in an effort to escape, but they are caught and sent back, as per the verse: *Whenever they desire to leave it out of anguish, they will be turned back into it: "Taste the punishment of the burning!"* (22:22)

…and whomever Allah leads astray has no guide: This serves as an explanation of the previous phrase *not having anyone to protect you from Allah*. In other words, you flee from punishment without anyone to protect you. And if there had been someone to protect you, it would have been God, but God will not protect you because He has left you astray, and whomever God leaves to go astray will find no guide.

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ يُوسُفُ مِنْ قَبْلُ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَمَا زِلْتُمْ فِي شَكٍّ مِمَّا
جَاءَكُمْ بِهِ ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا هَلَكَ قُلْتُمْ لَنْ يَبْعَثَ اللَّهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ رَسُولًا ۚ
كَذَٰلِكَ يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَنْ هُوَ مُسْرِفٌ مُرْتَابٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

(40:34) ***Certainly Joseph brought you manifest proofs earlier, but you continued to remain in doubt concerning what he had brought you. When he died, you said, Allah will never send any messenger after him. That is how Allah leads astray those who are profligate, sceptical.***

In order to illustrate what he means by saying that whomever God leaves to go astray has no guide, he presents the case of Joseph, who was an earlier prophet to the Egyptians. They doubted his prophethood so long as he was alive, and as soon as he died, they said that there was no prophet after him.

In other words, the believer from Pharaoh's clan is saying: I swear that Joseph brought you manifest proofs before, about whose prophethood there could be no doubt, but your remained dubious about what he brought you so long as he lived, but when he died you said that God had sent no messenger after him; you contradicted yourselves without compunction.

Then he emphasizes this with the explanation: *That is how Allah leads astray those who are profligate, sceptical.*

الَّذِينَ يُجَادِلُونَ فِي آيَاتِ اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ سُلْطَانٍ أَتَاهُمْ ۖ كَبُرَ مَقْتًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
وَعِنْدَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يَطْبَعُ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ قَلْبِ مُتَكَبِّرٍ جَبَّارٍ ﴿٣٥﴾

(40:35) ***Those who dispute the signs of Allah without any authority that may have come to them are greatly outrageous to Allah and to those who have faith. That is how Allah seals the heart of every arrogant tyrant.***

This is a description of every doubtful sinner. When someone oversteps the bounds by ignoring the truth, following their own whims, and allowing scepticism to settle in their souls, they are themselves incapable of settling on any knowledge or conviction about a proof that could guide them to the truth, so instead they dispute God's signs without any proof or basis other than the fact that God's signs run contrary to their whims.

That is how Allah seals the heart of every arrogant tyrant: In other words, their hearts are closed off such that they do not comprehend any proof nor understand any argument.

وَقَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ يَا هَامَانُ ابْنِ لِي صَرْحًا لَعَلِّي أَبْلُغُ الْأَسْبَابَ ﴿٣٦﴾ أَسْبَابَ
السَّمَاوَاتِ فَأَطَّلِعَ إِلَىٰ إِلَٰهِ مُوسَىٰ وَإِنِّي لَأَظُنُّهُ كَاذِبًا ۚ وَكَذَٰلِكَ زُيِّنَ لِفِرْعَوْنَ
سُوءُ عَمَلِهِ وَصُدَّ عَنِ السَّبِيلِ ۚ وَمَا كَيْدُ فِرْعَوْنَ إِلَّا فِي تَبَابٍ ﴿٣٧﴾

(40:36–37) ***And Pharaoh said, O Haman! Build me a tower so that I may reach the routes; the routes of the heavens and take a look at the Allah of Moses, and indeed I consider him a liar. To Pharaoh was thus presented as decorous the evil of his conduct, and he was kept from the way, and Pharaoh's stratagems only led him into ruin.***

Pharaoh orders his adviser Haman to erect a structure that would allow him to see the God of Moses. It is possible that he said this to Haman while the believer from his clan was presenting his arguments, after he had given up the idea of killing Moses for the time being. This would explain why this statement occurs in the middle of the believers admonitions and arguments.

According to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, the word used for this structure—*sarḥ*—refers to a tall structure that is visible to all for miles around, while routes (*asbāb*, sing. *sabab*) refers to a means by which one can reach

something distant or far away.

…so that I may reach the routes: This provides a rationale for his order to build this structure. In other words: I command you to build this structure because I wish to ascend it to reach the routes…. He then explains what he means by routes (*asbāb*) by saying immediately *the routes of the heavens* (asbāb al-samāwāt) and explains further: *and take a look at the Allah of Moses*. It is as if to say: The God that Moses invokes and calls on others to believe in does not exist on the earth, for there is no god here except me. Then, perhaps this God is in the heavens. So, build for me a tower so that I might ascend it to reach the routes of the heavens and peer therein that I might look upon this God of Moses—although, I believe He does not truly exist!

Some commentators have said: Pharaoh meant to build him an observatory so that he can examine the heavens so that he might find therein evidence for the existence of Moses' God, having exhausted his search for Him upon the earth. This is a good interpretation. However, whatever Pharaoh meant by this, it does not accord with the beliefs of any form of idolatry. In fact, it is likely that he said this in order to put on a pretence for the people or out of ignorance, neither of which is improbable for a tyrant.

To Pharaoh was thus presented as decorous the evil of his conduct, and he was kept from the way: From the context, it seems that this sentence is intended to convey a general rule to explain why, when Moses brought him the truth, he reacted as he did. It is because Satan had made his wicked deeds seem pleasant and diverted him from the path of good sense while making him believe he was following it. Hence, he disputed God's signs falsely and schemed and behaved ruthlessly in order to extinguish the truth.

The verse ends with the coda, *and Pharaohs stratagems only led him into ruin*—meaning he was utterly destroyed.

وَقَالَ الَّذِى آمَنَ يَا قَوْمِ اتَّبِعُونِ أَهْدِكُمْ سَبِيلَ الرَّشَادِ ﴿٣٨﴾

(40:38) ***And he who had faith said: "O my people! Follow me, I will guide you to the way of rectitude."***

He tells him people to follow him so that he can guide them, and in reality to follow him is to follow Moses. The *way of rectitude* (*sabīl al-rashād*) is the path one takes to reach the truth and attain everlasting felicity. Hence, guidance means to show someone the way. Note the parallel between what the believer says, *I will guide you to the way of rectitude*, and

what Pharaoh said previously, *and I guide you only to the way of rectitude* (40:29). The remainder of the meaning is clear.

يَا قَوْمِ إِنَّمَا هَٰذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا مَتَاعٌ وَإِنَّ الْآخِرَةَ هِيَ دَارُ الْقَرَارِ ﴿٣٩﴾

(40:39) ***O my people! This life of the world is only a provision, and indeed the Hereafter is the abiding home.***

This is the case he makes for following the way of rectitude and embracing the religion of truth. In fact, he argues that this is indispensable by asserting the belief that the human being will enjoy eternal and everlasting life in the hereafter: that this world is merely provision for that journey in the Hereafter and a step towards its ultimate goal. That is why he begins by mentioning this before he discusses evil and virtuous deeds.

مَنْ عَمِلَ سَيِّئَةً فَلَا يُجْزَىٰ إِلَّا مِثْلَهَا ۖ وَمَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ يُرْزَقُونَ فِيهَا بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿٤٠﴾

(40:40) ***Whoever commits a misdeed shall not be requited except with its like, but whoever acts righteously, whether male or female, should he be faithful such shall enter paradise, provided therein without any reckoning.***

In other words, what he will be afflicted with and live with in the afterlife will be akin to what he did in this world, which is the provision of the Hereafter, as this world is the abode of deeds and the next world is the abode of recompense.

So, whoever does evil in this world—a deed that has the quality of being evil—will not be requited in the hereafter with anything other than the harm that deed caused. Equally, whoever acts virtuously in this world, whether male or female, with no distinction between them, while being a believer, will enter paradise, wherein they will be provided for without any reckoning.

This verse highlights the equality of men and women when it comes to the acceptance of their deeds by God. This verse qualifies this with the condition that they be faithful, because good deeds done without faith are void. God says: *Should anyone renounce his faith, his work shall fail* (5:5), and there are other verses to the same effect.

In this way, the verse prevents the most succinct explanation of the religion of truth, namely that the human being has an eternal abode in

which he will be requited for his deeds in this world, whether evil or virtuous, so let the human being act virtuously and not act evilly. It also adds the detail that those who act virtuously will be provided for without any reckoning.

وَيَا قَوْمِ مَا لِي أَدْعُوكُمْ إِلَى النَّجَاةِ وَتَدْعُونَنِي إِلَى النَّارِ ﴿٤١﴾ تَدْعُونَنِي لِأَكْفُرَ بِاللَّهِ وَأُشْرِكَ بِهِ مَا لَيْسَ لِي بِهِ عِلْمٌ وَأَنَا أَدْعُوكُمْ إِلَى الْعَزِيزِ الْغَفَّارِ ﴿٤٢﴾

(40:41–42) ***O my people! [Think,] what makes me invite you to deliverance while you invite me toward the Fire? You invite me to defy Allah and to ascribe to Him partners of which I have no knowledge, while I call you to the All-mighty, the All-forgiver.***

This seems to suggest that when the believer from Pharaoh's clan invited his people to embrace monotheism, they invited him to come and worship their gods instead. It is also possible that this is his assessment of their situation because of their arguing with him on the basis of falsehoods and their obstinate refusal to forsake idolatry. Therefore, he says they are *inviting him* on the basis of their actions. In any case, he expresses amazement that they respond to his invitation to follow the truth with an invitation to follow falsehood.

So, he tells them: O my people! Why do I call you to salvation—meaning salvation from Hellfire—while you call me toward the Fire?—He called them towards the means of their salvation, while they called him to that which would consign him to hell. In other words, the Qur'an uses the outcomes of deeds (salvation and punishment) to refer to the causes of those outcomes—the deeds themselves.

Then, the believer from Pharaoh's clan explains what it is they are calling him towards and what he is calling them towards: *You invite me to defy Allah and to ascribe to Him partners of which I have no knowledge*—in other words, to associate something with God without any evidence for it being worthy of such an association, in which case I would be fabricating something about God in ignorance— *while I call you to the All-mighty, the All-forgiver*—the One who cannot be overcome, and who forgives those who turn to Him in penitence and believe in Him. In other words, he says: I invite you to believe in Him and submit to Him.

لَا جَرَمَ أَنَّمَا تَدْعُونَنِي إِلَيْهِ لَيْسَ لَهُ دَعْوَةٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَلَا فِي الْآخِرَةِ وَأَنَّ

مَرَدَّنَا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَأَنَّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ هُمْ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ ﴿٤٣﴾

(40:43) ***Undoubtedly, that to which you invite me has no invitation in the world nor in the Hereafter, and indeed our return will be to Allah, and indeed it is the profligates who will be inmates of the Fire.***

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In this verse, the believer from Pharaoh's clan argues that what they are inviting him to is not truly a god because there is no invitation from this deity itself. This builds on what he said in the previous verse, namely: *…of which I have no knowledge*.

The meaning is as follows: It has been proven that what you invite me to, which you refer to as a partner of God, has no invitation in this world because it has sent to messengers to humankind to summon them to its worship. Neither does it have any invitation in the hereafter, because no one will return to it. On the other hand, what I am calling you to—God Almighty—has an invitation in this world, which is delivered by the prophets and messengers He has sent from Himself and supported with proofs and manifest signs. Meanwhile, in the hereafter, all of creation will return to Him so that He might judge between them, as God says: "*The day He calls you, you will respond to Him, praising Him…*" (17:52).

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And it is clear, as we highlighted in our commentary on the above verse, *It is He who shows you His signs* (40:13), that lordship (*rubūbiyya*) necessarily entails a call (*daʿwa*) in this world, which is accompanied by a call (*daʿwa*) in the Hereafter. Therefore, if what he calls them to has a call in this world and a call in the hereafter and what they call him to does not, then what he calls them to is the real God, not what they call him to.

…and indeed our return will be to Allah, and indeed it is the profligates who will be inmates of the Fire: This joined to *Undoubtedly, that to which you invite me…*, meaning: And, undoubtedly, our return will be to God. Therefore, we must submit to Him, follow His way, and observe the bounds of His servanthood. And, undoubtedly, the profligates who overstep the bounds of servanthood—namely, you—will be the inmates of the Fire, so what I call you towards offers salvation, but what you call me towards does not.

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فَسَتَذْكُرُونَ مَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ ۚ وَأُفَوِّضُ أَمْرِي إِلَى اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بَصِيرٌ بِالْعِبَادِ ﴿٤٤﴾

(40:44) ***Soon you will remember what I tell you, and I entrust my affair to Allah. Indeed Allah sees best the servants.***

The beginning of this verse is an admonition and a threat to them, and it follows on from his saying, *indeed our return will be to Allah…*—in other words: If it is certain that we will return to God and the profligates will be punished—and you are they—and you do not pay attention to what I tell you today, you will soon remember what I tell you when you sight the punishment with your own eyes. Then, you will realise that I was trying to help you!

…and I entrust my affair to Allah: According to al-Rāghib, to entrust ones affair (*tafwīḍ*) means to return something to someone. So entrusting ones affair to God means devolving it to Him. Therefore, this approaches the meaning of *tawakkul* (relying on God) and *taslīm* (surrendering to God's will), but the sense of *tafwīḍ* differs slightly in that when the servant entrusts his affair to God, this means that he returns whatever part of this affair is seen as his to God. In which case, the condition of the servant is that of someone who has withdrawn and has no say in the matter. By contrast, *tawakkul* means making God ones trustee (*wakīl*) and relying on Him to take care of your affairs, while *taslīm* means completely and utterly submitting to whatever God wants, regardless of whether you have any say in the matter. Therefore, *tafwīḍ*, *tawakkul*, and *taslīm* are three of the stations of servanthood (*ʿubūdiyya*): First comes *tawakkul*, followed by *tafwīḍ*, which is more refined than *tawakkul*, followed by *taslīm*, which is more refined than *tafwīḍ*.

Indeed Allah sees best the servants: He offers this as an explanation of why he entrusts his affair to God, and he explicitly mentions the name God (*Allāh*) rather than simply saying He, which would have made sense given that he had just mentioned God by name in the previous sentence, to emphasise the reason why He sees best the servants; it is as if he said: Indeed He sees best the servants, because He is God.

فَوَقَاهُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتِ مَا مَكَرُوا ۖ وَحَاقَ بِآلِ فِرْعَوْنَ سُوءُ الْعَذَابِ ﴿٤٥﴾ النَّارُ يُعْرَضُونَ عَلَيْهَا غُدُوًّا وَعَشِيًّا ۖ وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ أَدْخِلُوا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ أَشَدَّ الْعَذَابِ ﴿٤٦﴾

(40:45–46) ***So Allah saved him from their evil schemes, while a terrible punishment besieged Pharaoh's clan; the Fire, to which they are exposed morning and evening. And on the day when the***

Hour sets in Pharaoh's clan will enter the severest punishment.

This follows from his entrusting his affair to God; he entrusted his affair to God, so God sufficed him against their evil and protected him from their schemes. This verse intimates that Pharaoh's supporters sought to do him harm but God repelled them from him.

…while a terrible punishment besieged Pharaoh's clan: The Arabic here reads *sūʾ al-ʿadhāb* (lit. terrible of punishment), which places an adjective in a possessive construct (*iḍāfa*) with the noun it qualifies. At the same time, the verse uses the verbal noun *sūʾ* (rather than the adjective *sayʾ*) to intensify the meaning. Here *Pharaohs clan* refers to his supporters and followers, and you can refer to someone's clan (*āl*) while including them in its number.

…the Fire, to which they are exposed morning and evening. And on the day when the Hour sets in Pharaoh's clan will enter the severest punishment: The context of this verse suggests that this it is explaining what is meant by *terrible punishment*, rather than mentioning something distinct.

This verse makes explicit a number of significant points:

First, there will be an exposure (*ʿaraḍ*) to the Fire, after which they will be entered into it (*idkhāl*), and entering it is more severe than being exposed to it.

Second, that this exposure to the Fire will take place before the Hour sets in—which is when they will enter the Fire—and, therefore, that this exposure takes place in *Barzakh* (the Isthmus)—a world that exists between death and resurrection.

Third, that the punishment they are subjected to in *Barzakh* and the punishment they are subjected to on the Day of Judgment are one and the same thing—the Fire of the Hereafter. However, the inmates of *Barzakh* are punished with it from afar, while the inmates of the Hereafter are punished by being put into it.

The phrase *morning and evening* indicates that this punishment is constant and unceasing. Perhaps the fact that the inhabitants of *Barzakh* continue to have some connection to morning and evening shows that they have not yet become fully detached from this world and the way time flows in it.

وَإِذْ يَتَحَاجُّونَ فِي النَّارِ فَيَقُولُ الضُّعَفَاءُ لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا إِنَّا كُنَّا لَكُمْ
تَبَعًا فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُغْنُونَ عَنَّا نَصِيبًا مِنَ النَّارِ ﴿٤٧﴾ قَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا إِنَّا

كُلٌّ فِيهَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ حَكَمَ بَيْنَ الْعِبَادِ ﴿٤٨﴾

(40:47–48) ***When they argue in the Fire, the weak will say to those who were arrogant, Indeed we used to follow you; so will you avail us against any portion of the Fire? Those who were arrogant will say: "Indeed we are all in it. Indeed Allah has judged between the servants."***

The context of the verse (47) indicates that *they* in *when they argue in the Fire* refers to Pharaoh's clan, as shown by the opening of the subsequent verse *Those in the Fire will say…* In other words: Pharaoh's clan will be besieged by a terrible punishment when they argue in the Fire (or: Mention their terrible punishment when they argue in the Fire), when the weaker of them will say to those who were arrogant: Indeed we used to follow you when were in the world, and that means you must provide for us our needs and help us in times of hardship. There is no hardship greater than what we are suffering now, so can you avail us against a portion of the Fire—even if you cannot save us from all of it, save us from a little, at least!

This conversation shows how deeply ingrained a habit it became in their souls to take recourse to their leaders and follow them instead of God, to the extent that they display the same behavior on the Day of Judgment even though they already know that no soul can avail another soul of anything on that day and that everything is in God's hand on it. There are other similar conversations quoted throughout the Qur'an in which they lie, dispute, rebuke their deeds, call one another liars, and more.

Those who were arrogant will say: Indeed we are all in it. Indeed Allah has judged between the servants: The arrogant respond to the complaints of the weak by saying: Today is the day of recompense, not the day of action. So, there are no recourses left for us to take. We have none of the power or authority we imagined for ourselves when we were in the world. So we are in the same situation as you—we are all in the Fire!

Their saying, *Indeed we are all in it. Indeed Allah has judged between the servants…* means: the advent of God's Judgment has invalidated all other Judgments, recourses, and influences, so that you and we are now on an equal footing; we have no more power than you do such that we could avail you of any of God's punishment.

Some commentators have said that *they* in *When they argue in the*

Fire refers to all of the disbelievers who are consigned to Hell, but, as you can see, this is an unlikely interpretation. As for the view that *they* in this passage refers to the Quraysh, it is even more unlikely.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ فِي النَّارِ لِخَزَنَةِ جَهَنَّمَ ادْعُوا رَبَّكُمْ يُخَفِّفْ عَنَّا يَوْمًا مِنَ الْعَذَابِ ﴿٤٩﴾

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(40:49) ***Those in the Fire will say to the keepers of hell: "Supplicate your Lord to lighten for us a days punishment."***

Now begins a conversation between the inmates of the Fire—including the members of Pharaoh's clan—and the angels who guard Hell. God presents this following the story of Pharaoh's clan, and the inmates only ask the angels to supplicate on their behalf because they have lost hope of God responding to them directly.

The meaning of *a days punishment* means a day relative to the world they now inhabit, rather than a day of this world, and hence should be understood as them asking to be relieved a portion of their punishment.

قَالُوا أَوَلَمْ تَكُ تَأْتِيكُمْ رُسُلُكُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ ۖ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ ۚ قَالُوا فَادْعُوا ۗ وَمَا دُعَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ ﴿٥٠﴾

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(40:50) ***They will say: "Did not your messengers use to bring you manifest proofs?" They will say: "Yes." They will say: "Then supplicate yourselves. But the supplications of the faithless only go awry."***

The guardians of Hell respond by asking the inmates whether messengers came to them with clear signs, and they confess that they did—which is tantamount to a confession that they denied these messengers and disbelieved in them even know they knew them to be upon the truth, which is a denial of prophethood (*nubuwwa*)—so the guardians do not respond to their request to supplicate on their behalf either in the affirmative or the negative. Instead, they return the request by telling the inmates to supplicate for themselves, implying that their pleas will not be answered.

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The phrase, *But the supplications of the faithless only go awry*, shows that their supplications have become affected by their own going astray (*ḍalāl*) and so will not be guided to their goal of obtaining a response. The context suggests that this is part of the speech of the angels who guard Hell, although it could also be God's own speech.

In any case, this sentence provides the reason why their prayers will not be answered. In short: Supplicate, but you will not be answered, because you have disbelieved, and the supplications of the disbelievers are never answered.

The fact that the absence of any answer to their prayers is predicated upon their disbelief indicates that it is this disbelief that has caused this, even though God has given His servants an explicit promise to respond to the supplication of any who invoke Him: *I answer the supplicant's call when he calls Me* (2:186). If a supplication is offered genuinely, then it will never be left unanswered, but what the wording of this promise indicates is that in order for this to be a genuine supplication or plea to God and for it to genuinely reach God, there are conditions that must be met: Namely, the supplicant must call on God and make an earnest request and, in this request, the supplicant must depend upon God alone and not take recourse to any other means except Him.

However, someone who disbelieves in the punishment of the Hereafter—meaning that they deny it and conceal its reality—cannot truly ask God to alleviate this punishment from them. In this world, it is obvious why this is the case. However, what about in the hereafter, where they have attained certainty about this punishment because they have directly experienced it, where they turn exclusively to God because of its severity, and where they take no recourse to anyone but Him? The reason why their supplication remains ineffective in the hereafter is because the attribute of denial remains with them in the form of a moral burden for which they have been punished. Therefore, they cannot earnestly and sincerely ask to be granted relief from something that they used to deny while they were alive in this world.

In addition to the above, if one of the conditions for God responding to their supplication is that they depend only upon Him, the same can be said of this too. How can they depend only on God in the hereafter when they never practiced this in this world? Pay close attention to this point!

We should also pay attention to the weakness of the argument that is sometimes made on the basis of this verse, namely that no supplication made by a disbeliever is ever answered. However, we can clearly see that this verse is saying that their prayers will not be answered with regards to the things in which they disbelieved and denied, not that no prayer of theirs will ever be heard. On the contrary, there are many verses of the Qur'an that affirm that God answers all peoples prayers in their hour of need.

إِنَّا لَنَنْصُرُ رُسُلَنَا وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ يَقُومُ الْأَشْهَادُ ﴿٥١﴾

(40:51) ***Indeed We shall help Our messengers and those who have faith in the life of the world and on the day when the witnesses rise up.***

This verse promises that God will help His messengers as a class of people, not that He will help each and every messenger in each and every situation they encounter. We have already discussed the meaning of divine assistance (*al-naṣr al-ilāhī*) in our commentary on the verse, *that they will indeed receive help* (37:172).

يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ الظَّالِمِينَ مَعْذِرَتُهُمْ ۖ وَلَهُمُ اللَّعْنَةُ وَلَهُمْ سُوءُ الدَّارِ ﴿٥٢﴾

(40:52) ***The day when the excuses of the wrongdoers will not benefit them, and the curse will lie on them, and for them will be the ills of the abode.***

This verse explains the meaning of *the day when the witnesses rise up*, and it appears that *the excuses of the wrongdoers* (in Arabic: *their excuses* or *maʿdhiratuhum*) is a case of a verbal noun being put in a possessive construct with the doer of the action. God did not make this conditional by saying, If they offer excuses. This is to show that they will definitely offer excuses on that day. As for the verses, *This is a day wherein they will not speak, nor will they be permitted to offer excuses* (77:35–6), this should be understood as referring to one of the stages they will go through on the Day of Resurrection and one of the fates they will suffer, because there are other verses that clearly indicate that they will speak on that day.

…*the curse will lie on them*… means that they will be far from God's mercy, while …*and for them will be the ills of the abode*… means they shall have an evil abode, namely Hell.

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْهُدَىٰ وَأَوْرَثْنَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ الْكِتَابَ ﴿٥٣﴾ هُدًى وَذِكْرَىٰ لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٥٤﴾

(40:53–4) ***Certainly We gave Moses the guidance and We made the Children of Israel heirs to the Book, as a guidance and an admonition for those who possess intellect.***

This is the conclusion for what has been said above about God sending

Moses with His signs and manifest authority, Pharaoh's disputations regarding these signs in which he took recourse to falsehood, and the arguments of the believer from Pharaoh's clan. God begins this passage with *Certainly* to emphasise the truthfulness of what He sent Moses with and the wickedness of their response to him.

The meaning of *hudā* (guidance) here is the religion that was sent with Moses, while making the Children of Israel *heirs to the Book* means that the Torah was kept amongst them for them to act upon it and be guided by it.

…as a guidance and an admonition for those who possess intellect: means that it was a guidance by which all of them could be guided, but it was also an admonition specifically for those who were endowed with intellects.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *ʿIlal al-Sharāʾiʿ*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq narrates via a chain of narrators from Ismāʿīl b. Manṣūr Abī Ziyād, from a narrator, from Abū ʿAbdallāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq], about Pharaoh's saying, *Let me slay Moses* (40:26), what prevented him from doing so? He said: His good sense prevented him, for no one kills a prophet or the descendant of a prophet except someone of illegitimate birth.

(2) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is narrated that Abū ʿAbdallāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] said: Dissimulation (*taqiyya*) is my religion and the religion of my forefathers, and anyone without dissimulation has no religion, for dissimulation is God's shield on the earth. For, if the believer from Pharaoh's clan had made manifest his faith, he would have been put to death.

Author's comments: There are many narrations from Shīʿī sources to this effect, and they are supported by verses of the Qur'an, such as God's saying: *except when you are wary of them out of caution* (3:28), and His saying: *barring someone who is compelled while his heart is at rest in faith* (16:106).

(3) In *al-Maḥāsin*, al-Barqī narrates via a chain of narrators from Ayyūb b. al-Ḥurr, from Abū ʿAbdallāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq], about the verse, *So Allah saved him from their evil schemes…*: They did assault him and kill him, so do you know what God protected him from? He protected him from being compelled to renounce his faith.

Author's comments: There are some other traditions to this effect,

and there are traditions from Sunnī sources that indicate that God saved him from being killed.

(4) In *al-Khiṣāl*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq narrates from Imām al-Ṣādiq: I am amazed by one who is terrified by four things and does not flee to four other things… I am amazed by one who falls victim to others schemes, how does he not take recourse to God's saying: "*and I entrust my affair to Allah. Indeed Allah sees best the servants*" (40:44), for I have heard God say about the outcome of his affair: "*So Allah saved him from their evil schemes*" (40:45)!

Author's comments: This is narrated in other works as well.

(5) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, we are told that a man asked Abū ʿAbdallāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]: What do you say about the verse, "*the Fire, to which they are exposed morning and evening*" (40:46)? Abū ʿAbdallāh asked him: What do people say? He answered: They say this is in the eternal Fire, but they are not punished between these times. He said: So that means they are felicitous! Someone asked: May I be your sacrifice! How can this be? He: This is only in this world. But, in the abode of eternity, the reality is reflected in the verse: "*And on the day when the Hour sets in Pharaohs clan will enter the severest punishment*."

Author's comments: By this world, he means Barzakh, which is frequently discussed in the traditions of the Prophets Household.

(6) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, Shaykh al-Ṭabrisī narrates from Nāfiʿ, who narrates from Ibn ʿUmar that God's Messenger said: Surely when one of you dies, he will be shown his resting place in the morning and the evening. If he is an inhabitant of paradise, he will see paradise. But if he is an inmate of the Fire, he will see the Fire. He will be told: "This is your resting place for which God will resurrect you on the Day of Judgment." This is also transmitted by al-Bukhārī and Muslim in their *Ṣaḥīḥ* collections of traditions.

Author's comments: al-Suyūṭī also narrates this in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, from al-Bukhārī and Muslim, as well as from Ibn Abī Shayba and Ibn Mardawayh.

This idea frequently appears in the traditions of the Imāms of the Prophets Household, and many of these have already been discussed in our commentary on *Barzakh* in the first part of this work[1] and in other places besides this.

1 See English vol. 1. (Ed.)

Verses 55 to 60

In the previous section, the Qur'an recounted the story of Moses: How he was sent to bring the truth to Pharaoh and his people, how they disputed God's signs using falsehoods and schemed against him, how God sent help to His prophet, through which He thwarted their plots, and the terrible fate that befell them as a result of this. In this section, God enjoins His Prophet to be steadfast and patient, and reminds him that God's promise of divine help is true and that the plots of his own people, their disputing God's signs using falsehood, and their arrogant refusal to accept his message will all come to nothing. In fact, all of this will rebound onto them as a burden of their own making. So, they cannot do anything to thwart God's plan, and when the Promised Hour sets in, they will be consigned to Hell for all eternity.

فَاصْبِرْ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لِذَنْبِكَ وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ بِالْعَشِيِّ وَالْإِبْكَارِ ﴿٥٥﴾

(40:55) ***So be patient! Allah's promise is indeed true. And plead for forgiveness for your sin, and celebrate the praise of your Lord morning and evening.***

This is the conclusion drawn from the previous section, which began with the verse: *Have they not travelled over the land so that they may observe how was the fate of those who were before them?* (40:21), followed by the story of Moses, what became of those who obstinately and falsely disputed his message, and God's promise to help the truth and its people.

Therefore, this verse means: If this is the case, then you must be steadfast and patient in the face of the idolaters persecution and false disputations. Surely, God's promise is true, and He will deliver what He has guaranteed. Here, the content of God's promise is reflected in the verse: *Indeed We shall help Our messengers and those who have faith…* (40:51).

When God says, *And plead for forgiveness for your sin…* this means to plead for forgiveness for what is a sin in relation to him, even if this is not a sin in the sense of contravening God's command because of his infallible status. We have already discussed the meaning of both sin (*dhanb*) and forgiveness (*maghfira*) at the end of the sixth volume of this work.

As for the meaning of sin in relation to the Prophet, we will discuss this further at the beginning of our commentary on Sūrah al-Fatḥ. Some scholars have said that the meaning of sin here is not the sin of the Prophet himself, but of his nation (*umma*), and pleading for forgiveness for this is a reference to intercession (*shafāʿa*) on their behalf.

…and celebrate the praise of your Lord morning and evening: In other words, declare Him transcendent while praising Him for His blessings continuously, each and every day (if we take *morning and evening* as an allusion), or each morning and evening (if we take it literally).

Some scholars have said that this is a reference to the prayers of the morning (*subḥ*) and the afternoon (*ʿaṣr*), and that this verse is Medinan.

However, it is clear from the narrations—including the accounts of the Prophets Night Journey—that the five daily prayers were all instituted in Mecca before the Emigration. Therefore, if this verse is a reference to two obligatory prayers, then this would have been in Mecca prior to the institution of the five daily prayers.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُجَادِلُونَ فِي آيَاتِ اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ سُلْطَانٍ أَتَاهُمْ ۙ إِنْ فِي صُدُورِهِمْ إِلَّا
كِبْرٌ مَا هُمْ بِبَالِغِيهِ ۚ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ ۖ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ ﴿٥٦﴾

(40:56) ***Indeed those who dispute the signs of Allah without any authority that may have come to them there is only vanity in their breasts, which they will never satisfy. So seek the protection of Allah; indeed He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing.***

This confirms the message of the previous verse to the Prophet to be patient and steadfast. It also reassures him of God's promise to come to his aid. It means that those who dispute God's signs are not succeeding in their aims and will never succeed in their aims, so do not be grieved by their disputations and let yourself feel reassured with regards to them.

Therefore, when God says *there is only vanity in their breasts*, He means that this is their only reason for disputing His signs. In other words, it is not because they are interested in seeking the truth or because they have any genuine doubt about these signs, nor is it because they have any proof or authority that they wish to make known. On the contrary, it is the pride and vanity contained in their hearts that motivates them to argue and to try and extinguish the truth.

…which they will never satisfy: Meaning, they will never satisfy their vanity through their disputations; this is because they only dispute in

order to invalidate the truth and refute the call of truth. But they will never attain this goal, which is only motivated by their pride and their vanity in the first place.

So seek the protection of Allah: Means, seek refuge with God from them and their vanity, just as Moses sought refuge from every arrogant disputer: *Moses said, "Indeed I seek the protection of my Lord and your Lord from every arrogant one who does not believe in the Day of Reckoning"* (40:27).

…indeed He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing: Meaning that God hears all of the supplications of His servants, and He sees all of their needs, and He is the one who can see whether they are in difficulty or ease.

لَخَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ خَلْقِ النَّاسِ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

(40:57) ***Surely the creation of the heavens and the earth is more prodigious than the creation of mankind, but most people do not know.***

The phrase *the heavens and the earth* refers to the totality of the cosmos. Based on its context, this verse means that those who dispute God's signs will neither attain their goals nor thwart God's plans. After all, God is the one with the power to create the entirety of the cosmos, and He was not hindered in this by its tremendousness, so how could he be thwarted by a tiny part of it—humankind—when they are His creatures and even more miniscule in relation to Him compared to it? However, most people are ignorant and imagine in their ignorance that they can thwart God's plans through their vain disputations and pointless scheming.

وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَلَا الْمُسِيءُ ۚ قَلِيلًا مَا تَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

(40:58) ***The blind one and the seer are not equal, neither are those who have faith and do righteous deeds and the evildoing. Little is the admonition that you take!***

Having mentioned that the majority of people do not know, God emphasizes this by highlighting that not all people are alike, for some are blind while others see, and the two are not equal. *Those who have faith*

and do righteous deeds are compared to those with sight, while *the evildoing* are compared to those whose hearts God has made blind so that they cannot take admonition.

Little is the admonition that you take! God addresses His audience directly to rebuke them by switching from the third person (they) to the second person (you).

إِنَّ السَّاعَةَ لَآتِيَةٌ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهَا وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

(40:59) ***Indeed the Hour is bound to come; there is no doubt in it. But most people do not believe.***

In this verse, God reminds His audience that the Hour is coming, while the next verse reminds them of God's call for them to call on Him and worship Him. This evokes the admonition delivered by the believer from Pharaoh's clan in the previous section, in which he too emphasized the immanent coming of the Hour and called attention to the fact that God has issued a call upon the earth and in the hereafter, while their idols have not.

وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمُ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِي سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ دَاخِرِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾

(40:60) ***And your Lord has said: "Call Me, and I will answer you!" Indeed those who are disdainful of My worship will enter hell in utter humility.***

This is a summons from God to His servants, in which He tells them to call on Him and guarantees that He will respond. The summons to call on God is universal, and so is His promise to answer His servants prayers—meaning it is not restricted to any one group or dependent upon any conditions. We have already discussed the meaning of supplication (*duʿāʾ*) and God answering supplications in our commentary on the verse in Sūrah al-Baqarah: *I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me* (2:186).

Indeed those who are disdainful of My worship will enter hell in utter humility: This verse has used the term *worship* (*ʿibāda*) in place of supplication (*duʿāʾ*), which shows that supplicating to God is an act of worship.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, about the verse, *"Call Me, and I will answer you!" Indeed those who are disdainful of My worship will enter hell in utter humility*, we read: You have called Your supplication worship and called forsaking it disdain, and You have promised those who forsake it that they will enter Hell in utter humility.

(2) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates via a chain of narrators from Ḥammād b. ʿIsā, from Abū ʿAbdallāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]: Supplicate to God, and do not say: "It has already been decided," for supplication is an act of worship. God says: "*Indeed those who are disdainful of My worship will enter hell in utter humility.*" And He says: "*Call Me, and I will answer you!*"

Author's comments: When Imām al-Ṣādiq says …for supplication is an act of worship, and quotes the passage, *Indeed those who are disdainful… in utter humility*, this is the evidence he adduces for his first command, namely: Supplicate to God. At the same time, when he quotes the passage, *Call Me, and I will answer you*, this is the evidence he adduces for his second point, namely: and do not say: "It has already been decided." This is why the Imām changes the order of the verse, placing its coda before its opening.

(3) In *al-Khiṣāl*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq narrates from Muʿāwiya b. ʿAmmār, from Abū ʿAbdallāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]: O Muʿāwiya! Whoever is granted three things will not be denied three others: Whoever is granted supplication (*duʿāʾ*) will be granted a response, and whoever is granted thanksgiving (*shukr*) will be granted an increase, and whoever is granted trust in God (*tawakkul*) will be granted sufficiency. For surely God has said: "*And whoever puts his trust in Allah, He will suffice him*" (65:3), and "*If you are grateful, I will surely enhance you*" (14:7); and "*Call Me, and I will answer you.*"

(4) In *al-Tawḥīd*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq narrates via a chain of narrators from Mūsā b. Jaʿfar: Some people said to al-Ṣādiq: "We call on Him but we receive no answer!" He said: "Because you call on someone who you do not know!"

Author's comments: We have quoted some of the narrations about supplication in our commentary on the verse, *I answer the supplicants call when he calls Me* (2:186), in the first volume of this work.

Verses 61 to 68

In this section, God returns again to the signs of His oneness in lordship and divinity, which He invoked earlier in this chapter with the verse: *It is He who shows you His signs…* (40:13).

اللَّهُ الَّذِى جَعَلَ لَكُمُ اللَّيْلَ لِتَسْكُنُوا فِيهِ وَالنَّهَارَ مُبْصِرًا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَذُو
فَضْلٍ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

(40:61) ***It is Allah who made the night for you, that you may rest in it, and the day to provide visibility. Indeed Allah is gracious to the people, but most people do not give thanks.***

In other words, He made the night dark for you so that you could rest therein from the labours of your day, in which you sought your provision, and He made the day bright for you so that you could seek His grace therein and earn a living. These are the pillars of the organization of human existence.

From this, it is apparent that crediting the day with providing visibility is a figurative abstraction, but it is not hyperbole, as some have claimed.

Indeed Allah is gracious to the people, but most people do not give thanks: God reminds them of His generosity towards them and scolds them for their failure to give proper thanks to Him for His abundant grace. And if they had wanted to give thanks to Him, they would have worshipped Him. This verse repeats the word *people* (nāss) instead of using a pronoun such as them to show that ingratitude is an ingrained characteristic of human beings, as He says elsewhere: *Indeed man is most unfair and ungrateful* (14:34).

ذَٰلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ فَأَنَّىٰ تُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

(40:62) ***That is Allah, your Lord, the creator of all things, there is no Allah except Him. Then where do you stray?***

In other words, the one who looks after the affairs of your life and provides you with the night for rest and the day for striving is God Almighty; He is your Lord because He is the one who looks after your affairs.

…the creator of all things: Meaning that He is also the Lord of all things, because He created everything, and creation (*khalq*) cannot be separated from governance (*tadbīr*). As a consequence, there can be no lord in existence other than Him for you or for anything else. That is why he follows this statement with the phrase, *there is no Allah except Him*. In other words, there is none worthy of worship except Him, for if there was another object of worship besides Him, then it would be a lord as well, because divinity (*ulūhiyya*) is a function of lordship (*rubūbiyya*).

Then where do you stray? In other words: So how is it that you turn away from His worship and worship others?

كَذَٰلِكَ يُؤْفَكُ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ يَجْحَدُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

(40:63) ***Thus are made to stray those who are used to impugning the signs of Allah.***

In other words, it is in this way that those who obstinately reject God's signs go astray, for these signs are obvious and not at all hidden, so the only way someone could not see what it is they point towards is if that person was in wilful denial.

اللَّهُ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ قَرَارًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً وَصَوَّرَكُمْ فَأَحْسَنَ صُوَرَكُمْ وَرَزَقَكُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ ۖ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٦٤﴾

(40:64) ***It is Allah who made the earth an abode for you, and the sky a canopy, and He formed you and perfected your forms, and provided you with all the good things. That is Allah, your Lord! Blessed is Allah, Lord of all the worlds!***

An 'abode' (*qarār*) means a place in which one resides and dwells, while a canopy (*binā'*)—according to what others have said—is a dome like that which Arabs would erect on their buildings. In this verse, God calls attention to the blessing of living on the earth under the sky.

…and He formed you and perfected your forms…: The [conjunction] 'and' (*fa*) here is expository, meaning that He created your forms perfectly. Consider the fine tools with which God has endowed the human being in his form, which allow him to perform a wide range of incredible feats, some of which no other living creature has shown themselves capable of

doing. Moreover, the human being is able to derive enjoyments from life that would never be possible for other life-forms on this earth.

…and provided you with all the good things: Namely, with all manner of provisions that are in harmony with the human beings different appetites, such as grains, fruits, meats, and others. No other animal eats such a varied diet as human beings do.

…That is Allah, your Lord!—[the director of your affairs]—Blessed is Allah, Lord of all the worlds! This passage praises God for His lordship over all of the worlds. Taking His exposition of His lordship and governance over the human realm as a starting point, He now highlights that there is only one domain of lordship and that His governance of the human realm is no different from his governance of all the worlds. This is because there is but a single cosmic order that governs all things, and that order runs by His commands alone. Therefore, it is God—and only God—who is the source of all the abundant good in the world, so blessed is He, Lord of all the worlds!

هُوَ الْحَيُّ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَادْعُوهُ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ ۗ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٦٥﴾

(40:65) ***He is the Living One, there is no Allah except Him. So supplicate Him, putting exclusive faith in Him. All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the worlds.***

The sentence, *He is the Living One* is absolute and unqualified by either rational or textual sources; it also indicates exclusivity. Therefore, the meaning is that God alone is pure and everlasting life uncontaminated by death; He is living in of Himself, while everything other than Him—whatever it may be—depends upon something else for its life.

If we suppose that one thing is inherently alive, while another depends upon another being for its life, only that which is inherently alive is inherently worthy of worship. That is why after saying, *He is the Living One*, the verse continues, *there is no Allah except Him*.

The context of both of these sentences is that they are intended to prepare the way for the command to supplicate to God, and not just any kind of supplication, but a supplication that recognizes His oneness and in which the supplicant dedicates their faith to Him alone, because He alone is the Living One and because He alone is inherently worthy of being worshipped. That is why God follows *He is the Living One, there is*

no Allah except Him with *So supplicate Him, putting exclusive faith in Him*.

Then the phrase, *All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the worlds*, praises Him again for His lordship over all the worlds.

قُلْ إِنِّي نُهِيتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ لَمَّا جَاءَنِيَ الْبَيِّنَاتُ مِنْ رَبِّي وَأُمِرْتُ أَنْ أُسْلِمَ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾

(40:66) ***Say, "I have been forbidden to worship those whom you invoke besides Allah, since there have come to me manifest proofs from my Lord, and I have been commanded to submit to the Lord of all the worlds."***

The meaning of this verse is clear, and its message to the idolaters is that they should give up any hope of convincing the Prophet to worship their idols. The same message is found in Sūrah al-Zumar, and a comparison of the passages in both chapters of the Qur'an suggests that this chapter was revealed after Sūrah al-Zumar.

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ عَلَقَةٍ ثُمَّ يُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِتَبْلُغُوا أَشُدَّكُمْ ثُمَّ لِتَكُونُوا شُيُوخًا ۚ وَمِنْكُمْ مَنْ يُتَوَفَّىٰ مِنْ قَبْلُ ۖ وَلِتَبْلُغُوا أَجَلًا مُسَمًّى وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

(40:67) ***It is He who created you from dust, then from a drop of fluid, then from a clinging mass, then He brings you forth as infants, then so that you may come of age, then that you may become aged though there are some of you who die earlier and so that you may complete a specified term, and so that you may apply reason.***

When God says He created them from dust, He is referring to their forefather Adam, as if He had created anyone else from dust, they would not have been a descendant of Adam. So their creation from dust refers to their creation from Adam, who was made from dust. Alternatively, this may be to call attention to the fact that the drop of fluid from which they are created is composed of terrestrial elements.

Then from a drop of fluid…: Then We created you from a lowly drop of semen—*then from a clinging mass*—and in this way—*then He brings you forth*—from your mothers wombs—*as infants*…. Some have said that the Arabic word *ṭifl* (infant, pl. *aṭfāl*), while often thought of as singular,

can be used to refer to both one and many, as in the verse: …*or children uninitiated to women's parts* (24:31; where the word *children* is also *ṭifl* rather than *aṭfāl*).

…then so that you may come of age…: There is an implicit meaning here, namely *then* He nourishes you *so that you may come of age*, which refers to the time when a persons faculties are fully developed.

…then that you may become aged…: This is connected to *so that you may come of age*, meaning He nourishes you *so that you may come of age, then that you may become aged.*

…though there are some of you who die earlier…: That is, and do not reach these stages of life, such as old age, coming of age, or others.

…and so that you may complete a specified term…: Which is the end of the maximum time allotted for you in this world, which there is no way to alter or delay, for it is the universal end of all people no matter how much they age: *the specified term is with Him* (6:2). Hence, this sentence is not joined to the previous one by 'then' (*thumma*) in order to distinguish it from the previous two stages of life.

…and so that you may apply reason: So that you might ascertain the truth through applying the intellect with which you have been endowed, which is the ultimate purpose for which human beings we created in terms of their spiritual existence, just as coming of age is the goal of their material worldly life.

هُوَ الَّذِى يُحْيِۦ وَيُمِيتُ ۖ فَإِذَا قَضَىٰٓ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُۥ كُن فَيَكُونُ ﴿٦٨﴾

(40:68) ***It is He who gives life and brings death. So when He decides on a matter, He just says to it, Be! and it is.***

He is the one who causes life and death, in which He moves the living from one world to another, both of which are venues in which He disposes His blessings for those whose affairs He governs.

So when He decides on a matter, He just says to it, "Be!" and it is: We have explained this multiple times already.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd and Ibn Abī Ḥātim narrate via an authentic chain of narrators from Ibn al-ʿĀliya that the Jews came to the Prophet and said: The Dajjāl will be from amongst us in the End Times…—then they magnified his affair and described what he would do. In response, God revealed

the verse: *Indeed those who dispute the signs of Allah without any authority that may have come to them there is only vanity in their breasts, which they will never satisfy* (40:56). God told His Messenger, He will not achieve what they claim, then He revealed: *So seek the protection of Allah* and instructed His Prophet to seek His protection from the tribulation of the Dajjāl: *Surely the creation of the heavens and the earth is more prodigious than the creation of mankind*—meaning the Dajjāl.

(2) In the same source, Ibn Abī Ḥātim narrates from Kaʿb al-Aḥbār concerning the verse, *Indeed those who dispute the signs of Allah without any authority*: They are the Jews. This was revealed about them because of their expectations about the Dajjāl.

(3) In the same source, Ibn al-Mundhir narrates from Ibn Jarīḥ concerning the verse, *Surely the creation of the heavens and the earth is more prodigious than the creation of mankind* that the Jews claimed: There will be a king from us in the End Times; the sea will reach up to his knees, and the clouds will be beneath his head. He will catch birds as they fly through the air. He will have a mountain of bread and a river. Whereat the verse was revealed: *Surely the creation of the heavens and the earth is more prodigious than the creation of mankind*.

Author's comments: You will have noticed from the commentary above that the central concern of this chapter of the Qur'an, based on the context of its verses, is the disbelievers arrogance and their disputing God's signs untruthfully. It is with this topic that the chapter begins, and it is to this topic that it returns time and again. For example, see the verses:

No one disputes the signs of Allah except the faithless (40:4)

…and disputed erroneously to refute the truth (40:5)

Those who dispute the signs of Allah without any authority that may have come to them are greatly outrageous (40:35)

Indeed those who dispute the signs of Allah without any authority that may have come to them there is only vanity in their breasts (40:56)

Have you not regarded those who dispute the signs of Allah, where they are being led away? (40:69)

Therefore, the context and tone of the verses precludes the possibility

Verses 69 to 78

The discourse now turns once again to those who dispute God's signs and what will become of them, recalling what befell those who were like them in nations past and also recalling God's assistance to His messengers that was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. God mentions this generally, at first, before turning to the example of Moses' mission, especially with regards to the stories the Qur'an recounts about him and the divine help he received. Finally, God enjoins His Prophet to be patient and steadfast and guarantees His assistance.

This is the last time that those who dispute God's signs are mentioned in this chapter. These verses discuss their fate and the everlasting punishment that lies in store for them. Finally, God enjoins the Prophet to be patient, then promises him divine assistance, and then reassures him that God's promise is true.

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ يُجَادِلُونَ فِي آيَاتِ اللَّهِ أَنَّىٰ يُصْرَفُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾

(40:69) ***Have you not regarded those who dispute the signs of Allah, where they are being led away?***

Have you not regarded…? is an expression of amazement, while 'where' (*annā*) can also be understood as how here. Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: Are you not amazed by those who dispute God's signs, how they are led away from truth to falsehood and from guidance and into error?

This verse calls attention to the condition of those who dispute God's signs here in order to highlight that they have gone astray from the truth and guidance and what will become of them as a result. By contrast, when they were last discussed in the verse, *Indeed those who dispute the signs of Allah without any authority that may have come to them there is only vanity in their breasts, which they will never satisfy* (40:56), this said that they were motivated by vanity and would never accomplish their goals, so the present verses are not a case of repetition.

Some have argued that the repeated mention of those who dispute God's signs shows that there were a number of debates that took place. This might have been with different groups, such that those who disputed God's signs in the previous verse and different to those mentioned in this

verse, or that each debate was about a different topic each time, such that the previous debate was about Resurrection, while the current debate is about monotheism. However, as should be obvious, this interpretation neglects this chapter of the Qur'ans overarching purpose.

الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِالْكِتَابِ وَبِمَا أَرْسَلْنَا بِهِ رُسُلَنَا ۖ فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

(40:70) ***Those who deny the Book and what we have sent with Our messengers. Soon they will know***

The subsequent verses indicate that *those who dispute the signs of Allah* are from the Prophets own people and, therefore, that the meaning of *the Book* here is none other than the Qur'an itself, and *what we have sent with Our messengers* refers to the scriptures and teachings brought by the prophets, for the idol-worshippers deny the very idea of prophethood.

إِذِ الْأَغْلَالُ فِي أَعْنَاقِهِمْ وَالسَّلَاسِلُ يُسْحَبُونَ ﴿٧١﴾ فِي الْحَمِيمِ ثُمَّ فِي النَّارِ يُسْجَرُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

(40:71–72) ***when, with iron collars around their necks and chains, they are dragged into scalding waters and then cast into the Fire.***

In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, we read: *Aghlāl* ("iron collars") is the plural of *ghull*, which refers to a collar placed around the neck to humiliate and hurt someone, while *salāsil* ("chains") refers to a long chain made of linked rings. To "drag" someone means to pull them along the ground, while "to set aflame" originally meant "to throw fuel into a fire place, such as an oven."

The sentence …*when, with iron collars around their necks and chains* is an adverb that qualifies the phrase …*soon they will know*. Some scholars have said that the word 'when' (*idh*)—normally signifying something that happened in the past—is used here, it is to show that this event will surely come to pass in the future.

…*iron collars around their necks* is a nominal sentence consisting of a subject and a predicate, while *and chains* is joined to *iron collars around their necks*. *They are dragged into scalding waters* is another predicate, and *then cast into the Fire* is conjoined to *dragged*.

This verse means: They will soon know the reality of their deeds, when iron collars and chains will be put around their necks and they will be dragged through scalding hot water before being thrown into Hell.

Some scholars have said, *then cast into the Fire* means they will become fuel for the Fire, and this is supported by God's descriptions of Hell: … *beware the Fire whose fuel will be humans and stones* (2:24) and *Indeed you and what you worship besides Allah shall be fuel for hell* (21:98).

ثُمَّ قِيلَ لَهُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ تُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ ۖ قَالُوا ضَلُّوا عَنَّا بَلْ لَمْ نَكُنْ نَدْعُو مِنْ قَبْلُ شَيْئًا ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾

(40:73-74) ***Then they will be told, "Where are those you used to take as partners besides Allah?" They will say, "They have forsaken us. Rather, we did not invoke anything before." That is how Allah leads astray the faithless.***

In other words, while they are being dragged through scalding water and cast into the Fire, they will be asked: Where are those partners you associated with God? Why don't they come to your aid and save you from this punishment or intercede on your behalf, as you claimed they would when you were worshipping them?

They will say, "They have forsaken us…": The Arabic uses the verb *ḍallū*, meaning to go astray to say that these deities have left them, in the same way that one might say an animal has strayed if it wanders off and its owner does not know where to find it. This is their answer to the question: *Where are those you used to take as partners besides Allah?*

Rather, we did not invoke anything before: Here, they go back on their previous answer because it is now clear that the deities that they claimed were partners beside God were nothing but empty names and false ideas, which did not refer to anything real. This means that their worship of these deities was nothing but meaningless commotion and, therefore, they say that they did not, in fact, worship anything at all, as God says: *Then We shall set them apart from one another* (10:28) and *Certainly all links between you have been cut, and what you used to claim has forsaken you* (6:94).

Alternatively, some commentators have understood this as a lie they will tell on the Day of Resurrection, similar to the verse: *By Allah, our Lord, we were not polytheists* (6:23).

That is how Allah leads astray the faithless: Meaning, that in all the situations where God leads the disbelievers astray, it is because they are the ones who conceal the truth. In doing so, they resemble one who has literally strayed, because they see what is false as true and go after it, only for it to become clear later that their efforts were misguided and what they

sought was nothing but falsehood with the appearance of truth: a mirage with the semblance of reality.

On the other hand, if we read their prior statement—*Rather, we did not invoke anything before*—as a lie, then the verse means: This is how God leads the faithless astray, such that when their deeds come back to them they have no choice but to lie, even though they know with certainty that lying will do them no good now.

Scholars have suggested other interpretations of this verse that are similar to the two we have outlined above.

ذَٰلِكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَفْرَحُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَبِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَمْرَحُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

(40:75) ***That is because you used to rejoice unduly on the earth and because you used to walk exultantly.***

Rejoicing (*faraḥ*) refers to any happiness, while exulting (*maraḥ*) denotes going to the extremes of happiness, which is an undesirable trait. Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī says the *faraḥ* signifies the opening of ones breast because of a present enjoyment, and this usually pertains to bodily enjoyments. And he says that *maraḥ* is extreme *faraḥ* and enlargement thereof.

That…refers to the punishment they are now suffering in the Hereafter…*is because you*…, or, alternatively: …*while you used to*….

Meaning that the punishment that you are now suffering is because of how you would rejoice unduly on the earth because of transient enjoyments, because you went to the extremes of happiness because your hearts were attached to the world of appearances and its trinkets, and because of your enmity for any truth that challenged your false ideas. So, you rejoiced and exulted in the revival of your falsehoods and the destruction of the truth and its erasure.

In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, we read:

> "Note that their rejoicing (*faraḥ*) is qualified (*muqayyad*) with 'unduly' (*bi ghayr al-ḥaqq*), while there exulting (*maraḥ*) is not. This is because a person might rejoice for a good reason and thereby do something praiseworthy, or they might rejoice for the wrong reasons and thereby do something blameworthy. By contrast, exulting is, by definition, blameworthy."

ادْخُلُوا أَبْوَابَ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ۖ فَبِئْسَ مَثْوَى الْمُتَكَبِّرِينَ ﴿٧٦﴾

(40:76) ***Enter the gates of hell, to remain therein. Evil is the abode***

of the arrogant.

Meaning: Enter those of its gates to which you have been assigned and dwell within it forever. Hell is an evil place of rest for those who disdained the truth, and we have already discussed elsewhere that the gates (*abwāb*) of Hell refer to its different levels (*darajāt*).

فَاصْبِرْ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ ۚ فَإِمَّا نُرِيَنَّكَ بَعْضَ الَّذِي نَعِدُهُمْ أَوْ نَتَوَفَّيَنَّكَ فَإِلَيْنَا يُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٧٧﴾

(40:77) ***So be patient! Allah's promise is indeed true. Whether We show you a part of what We promise them, or take you away, they will be brought back to Us.***

Having expounded the fate that awaits those who dispute God's signs—namely, the Fire—and that God leads them astray by their own faithlessness, God draws a conclusion from this for His Messenger, namely that He should be patient and steadfast for this reason, because God's promise is true.

Whether We show you a part of what We promise them…—by punishing them in this world—*…or take you away…*—by causing you to die, so that you do not see this—*…they will be brought back to Us*—they will not escape and We will deliver what We promised them.

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْهُمْ مَنْ قَصَصْنَا عَلَيْكَ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ لَمْ نَقْصُصْ عَلَيْكَ ۗ وَمَا كَانَ لِرَسُولٍ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ بِآيَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ۚ فَإِذَا جَاءَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ قُضِيَ بِالْحَقِّ وَخَسِرَ هُنَالِكَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ ﴿٧٨﴾

(40:78) ***Certainly We have sent messengers before you. Of them are those We have recounted to you, and of them are those We have not recounted to you. A messenger may not bring any sign except by Allah's permission. Hence when Allah's edict comes, Judgment is made with justice, and it is thence that the falsifiers become losers.***

This verse explains how the divine aid (*naṣr*) promised in the previous verse will come to them. Namely, that God's precedent (*sunna*) when it comes to judging between each messenger and his people and causing truth to triumph over falsehood—as in the verse, *There is an apostle for every nation; so when their apostle comes, Judgment is made between them*

with justice, and they are not wronged (10:47)—has not been to delegate this power to any of His messengers before you, but rather whichever of these messengers brought down this punishment on their people did it by God's permission. In other words, your situation is no different from theirs, so it is possible that we will permit you to call down this punishment on them, in which case We will show you a portion of what We have promised them, but it is also possible that We will cause you to die and We will only show you that when God's command comes, the affair will be decided between them in truth, and that is when the falsifiers will lose out. This is what the context of the verse suggests.

Certainly We have sent messengers before you. Of them are those We have recounted to you, and of them are those We have not recounted to you: The context for this passage is that God wishes to call attention to the fact that what He is about to mention is an established divine precedent or precedent (*sunnah*).

A messenger may not bring any sign except by Allah's permission: This refers to something broader than the miracles that messengers perform to demonstrate the authenticity of their divine mission, and indeed the verse in which God promises to judge between a messenger and his people and cause the truth to triumph, as everything is by God's permission (*bi idhn Allāh*). However, based on the context of the verse it is clear that what this refers to is judging between a messenger and his people.

Hence when Allah's edict comes, Judgment is made with justice, and it is thence that the falsifiers become losers: Meaning, that when God's edict of punishment comes, that Judgment is made justly; truth will triumph and falsehood will disappear, whereat those who held fast to falsehood will lose both by perishing in this world and suffering eternally in the next.

This verse could also be adduced as evidence for the existence of divine messengers who are not mentioned in the Qur'an. However, it should also be noted that this verse is of Meccan providence and, as such, may only refer to the fact that the stories of these messengers have not been revealed at the time of its revelation. However, it has been revealed in Sūrah al-Nisāʾ that there are *messengers We have recounted to you earlier and messengers We have not recounted to you, and to Moses Allah spoke directly* (4:164), and none of the chapters revealed after Sūrah al-Nisāʾ mention the names of any messengers whose names are included in those chapters of the Qur'an revealed before it.

In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is narrated that ʿAlī said: God sent an African prophet whose story has not been recounted to us. And a tradition with the same meaning is narrated from him in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from al-Ṭabarānī's *al-Awsaṭ* and Ibn Mardawayh.

Verses 79 to 85

The chapter returns once again to discuss the signs of divine unity and call on its audience to ponder the fates of those past nations who were destroyed and reflect on how God interacted with them: He sent them messengers, then He judged between their messengers and themselves, and this led to the loss of those who disbelieved. It is at this point that the chapter draws to a close.

اللَّهُ الَّذِى جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَنْعَامَ لِتَرْكَبُوا مِنْهَا وَمِنْهَا تَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾ وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا مَنَافِعُ وَلِتَبْلُغُوا عَلَيْهَا حَاجَةً فِى صُدُورِكُمْ وَعَلَيْهَا وَعَلَى الْفُلْكِ تُحْمَلُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

(40:79–80) ***It is Allah who made the cattle for you that you may ride some of them, and some of them you eat; and there are uses in them for you, and that over them you may satisfy any need that is in your breasts, and you are carried on them and on ships.***

Here, God calls attention to the things that God has provided for the benefit of human beings in their lives and how He looks after their affairs. *Of them* is used here to signify some *of them*. *Cattle* refers to camels, cows, and sheep. Some scholars have said that this verse refers specifically to the camel.

…who made the cattle for you that you may ride some of them, and some of them you eat: *made* (jaʿl) here may refer either to God having created them or to His placing them at the disposal of human beings. Therefore, the full meaning is: God created cattle for you—or placed them at your disposal—and the purpose of this was so that you could ride some of them—such as camels—and you could eat others—such as camels, cows, and sheep.

When God says, *and there are uses in them for you*, this includes all the products that can be taken from them, such as milk, wool, fur, hair, hide, and others. *…and that over them you may satisfy any need that is in your breasts* refers to the fact that they were made in order to help you reach your goal by riding on their backs. The *need that is in your breasts* means travelling from one place to another for a variety of reasons.

…and you are carried on them and on ships—highlights that humans can traverse land and sea using mounts and ships.

وَيُرِيكُمْ آيَاتِهِ فَأَيَّ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ تُنْكِرُونَ ﴿٨١﴾

(40:81) ***He shows you His signs. So which of the signs of Allah do you deny?***

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We have already discussed the meaning of God showing people His signs in our commentary at the beginning of this chapter. However, it seems that this sentence is not repeated for its own sake, but in order to serve as a preliminary for the rebuke that follows: *So which of the signs of Allah do you deny?* In other words, God has shown you these signs manifestly and visibly, but you deny them in such a way as to deny God's oneness.

أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ ۚ كَانُوا أَكْثَرَ مِنْهُمْ وَأَشَدَّ قُوَّةً وَآثَارًا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَمَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

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(40:82) ***So, have they not travelled over the land so that they may observe how was the fate of those who were before them? They were more numerous than them and were greater in power and with respect to the effects in the land. But what they used to earn did not avail them.***

This is another rebuke that calls on them to reflect on what became of others like them in past nations and how God's Judgment befell them. A similar verse appears at the beginning of the chapter (40:21), but the purpose of the first verse is to warn them that God will seize all of them for their sins, because His messengers came to them but they rejected them. That is why God says in that verse: *But then Allah seized them for their sins*. However, the purpose of the present verse is to tell them that what they have earned in this world will not avail them, nor will what the knowledge they rejoice in keep them safe from God's punishment, nor will their repentance or regret for what they have done be of any use when it descends.

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The verse begins with 'So…' (*fa…*) to signal the shift from addressing them directly in the second person (you) to speaking about them in

the third person (they). It is as if this verse is meant to follow on from *So which of the signs of Allah do you deny?* So that, after blaming them and censuring them for denying God's signs in the previous verse, God ceases to address them and turns to His prophet instead, showing that He is no longer speaking to them directly. He says: His verses are clear and manifest and cannot be denied, and this includes His signs in the traces of past nations that tell their stories. So, if the idolaters have travelled in the land and seen these signs, then why do they not reflect on them? For, if they did, it would be clear to them that even though past nations were stronger than they are—in both quantity and quality—the knowledge and power they exulted in did not avail them anything against God.

فَلَمَّا جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَرِحُوا بِمَا عِنْدَهُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ وَحَاقَ بِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِئُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

(40:83) ***When their messengers brought them manifest proofs, they exulted in the knowledge they possessed, and they were besieged by what they used to deride.***

The seven third-person masculine plural pronouns (they, their, and them) that appear in this verse refer to those who came before the Prophet's people. *The knowledge they possessed* means that their hearts and minds were occupied with the vanities of this world and the arts of governance through which they had attained their successes and gained their enjoyments therein. God considers this a kind of knowledge (*ʿilm*) but says that this is all that they knew: *They know just an outward aspect of the life of the world, but they are oblivious of the Hereafter* (30:7), and *So avoid those who turn away from Our remembrance and desire nothing but the life of the world. That is the ultimate reach of their knowledge* (53:29–30).

When God says that *they exulted in the knowledge they possessed*, He means that they were extremely impressed by the outward knowledge and expertise they had acquired, and it was their fascination with this knowledge that distracted them from the true wisdom that the divine messengers brought them and led them to deride and belittle it. That is why, after describing their exultation, God adds: *and they were besieged by what they used to deride*.

There are other opinions about the meaning of *they exulted in the knowledge they possessed*. For example, some commentators say that it refers to their false beliefs and erroneous opinions, which God only refers

to as 'knowledge' (*ʿilm*) derisively. They exulted in it while dismissing the knowledge of the divine messengers by comparison. However, as you can see, this is a theory without evidence in the verse itself.

Other commentators have suggested that the meaning of knowledge here is the philosophical knowledge of the Greeks and the Materialists (*Dahriyyūn*) who, when they heard of revelation and the teachings of prophethood, belittled the knowledge of the prophets while gloating about what they possessed. However, this reading suffers from the same absence of evidence as the previous one. Also, neither of these meanings appears to apply to the nations whose stories the Qur'an recounts, such as the peoples of Noah, ʿĀd, Thamūd, Abraham, Lot, Jethro, and others.

Some scholars have argued that the real meaning of the verse is that when their messengers came to them with manifest proofs, they did not exult in the knowledge they had brought them but rather in the ignorance they already had. Then, the verse calls this ignorance knowledge in order to deride them, so it says: They exulted in the knowledge they possessed. In addition to being a rather tortuous and unlikely reading of the verse, it also suffers from the same absence of evidence we saw with the previous two.

Other scholars still have suggested that the *they* in *they exulted* refers to the disbelievers, while the *they* in *the knowledge they possessed* refers to the messengers. In other words, the disbelievers exulted in the knowledge that the messengers possessed, meaning that they mocked and derided them for it. However, if this is what was meant, there should have been a clearer distinction made concerning the parties to whom the pronouns are referring. Furthermore, the word exultation (*faraḥ*) is not synonymous with mockery and derision (*istihzāʾ*) and there is no contextual indication that this is what was meant by it. Therefore, this reading should be discounted.

Some commentators have said that the two *they* pronouns of *they exulted in the knowledge they possessed* refer to the messengers. This in the sense that, when the messengers came to their peoples and saw how steeped in ignorance, faithlessness, and obstinate denial they were, the messengers knew what fate awaited them, and so they rejoiced in the true knowledge they had be given and gave thanks to God for that.

However, the context and tone of the verse make clear that this passage is intended as an exposition of the condition of the faithless after the messengers came to them with clear proofs and how their faith would not benefit them after God's impending punishment had become manifest. In what way could the messengers rejoicing because of the true knowledge they had been given be relevant to this? In addition to the above,

this reading also leads to a confusion about the referents of the different instances of *they* in the verse.

فَلَمَّا رَأَوْا بَأْسَنَا قَالُوا آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَحْدَهُ وَكَفَرْنَا بِمَا كُنَّا بِهِ مُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٨٤﴾

(40:84) ***Then, when they sighted Our might, they said, We believe in Allah alone, and disavow what we used to take as His partners.***

'Might' (*ba's*) here refers to the severity of the divine punishment; the remainder of the verse is clear.

فَلَمْ يَكُ يَنْفَعُهُمْ إِيمَانُهُمْ لَمَّا رَأَوْا بَأْسَنَا ۖ سُنَّتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي قَدْ خَلَتْ فِي عِبَادِهِ ۖ وَخَسِرَ هُنَالِكَ الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

(40:85) ***But their faith was of no benefit to them when they sighted Our punishment, Allah's precedent which has passed among His servants, and it is thence that the faithless will be losers.***

This is because their faith was not voluntary at that point—*Allah's precedent which has passed among His servants…*—meaning it was the approach that God has followed in the past with His servants that he would not accept any repentance after the punishment was sighted—*and it is thence that the faithless will be losers.*

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Chapter 41

Sūrah al-Fuṣṣilat

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Verses 1 to 12

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

This chapter discusses how people turn away from the scripture that has been sent down to them—meaning the Qur'an. This is the central concern around which it revolves, and to which it returns time and again in the flow of its discourse. The chapter begins with the words: *A [revelation] sent down from the All-beneficent, the Most Merciful* (41:2). Later, it says: *The faithless say: "Do not listen to this Qur'an…"* (41:26). Then, it says: *Indeed those who commit sacrilege in Our signs are not hidden from Us…* (41:40) and *Indeed those who defy the Reminder when it comes to them…* (41:41). Finally, it closes with the words: *Say, "Tell me, if it is from Allah and you disbelieve in it…"* (41:52).

The logical corollary of people turning away from the Book of God is that they also deny the three principles that form the foundation of its call to truth, namely monotheism, prophethood, and resurrection. And this is why God talks at length about these topics in this chapter, coupled with glad tidings for the believers and warnings for the disbelievers.

Sūrah Fuṣṣilat is of Meccan provenance based on the content of its verses, and according to the narrations, it is one of the chapters revealed in the early stages of the Prophet's mission in Mecca.

حم ۝١ تَنۡزِيلٌ مِنَ الرَّحۡمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝٢

(41:1–2) ***Ḥā Mīm: A [revelation] sent down from the All-beneficent, the Most Merciful,***

In terms of its syntactical structure, the second verse is the predicate (*khabar*) of an implicit subject (*mubtada'*). At the same time, the verbal noun *tanzīl* is used in the sense of the verb's passive participle (that is, sent down). Hence, the meaning reads: This is sent down from the

All-beneficent, the Most Merciful. As for the two divine names mentioned that are invoked here: the All-beneficent (*al-Raḥmān*) exemplifies God's boundless mercy that encompasses both the believer and the disbeliever, while the Most Merciful (*al-Raḥīm*) signifies His mercy that is reserved for the faithful alone. In doing so, God indicates that this revelation that has been sent down to humankind will set right people's worldly life just as it will set right their afterlife.

كِتَابٌ فُصِّلَتْ آيَاتُهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣﴾

(41:3) *a Book whose signs have been elaborated, an Arabic Qur'an, for a people who know,*

This is a second predicate for the same subject (that is, This). *Tafṣīl* (to elaborate) conveys a meaning that is the opposite to that of *iḥkām* (to make definitive) and *ijmāl* (to summarize). By elaborating the signs of the Qur'an, God means to distinguish its dimensions and parts from one another by sending it down to the level of comprehensible speech, such that the listener who is aware of the rules of language can understand its meanings and discern its purposes. This is something alluded to elsewhere in the Qur'an, when God says: *a Book, whose signs have been made definitive and then elaborated, from One who is all-wise, all-aware* (11:1), and when He says: *We have made it an Arabic Qur'an so that you may apply reason, and indeed it is with Us in the Mother Book, surely sublime and definitive…* (43:4).

In the present verse, the phrase *an Arabic Qur'an* is adverbial (*ḥāl*) and refers either to the state of the book or of its verses. The particle 'for' (*li*) in *for a people who know* (li qawmin yaʿlamūn) is there either to explain the motivation behind the act (that is, for the sake of 'a people who know') or for specificity (that is, only 'for a people who know'). As for the object of the verb *know*, this is either implicit, in which case it means for a people who know its meanings because they are familiar with the language in which it was revealed—Arabic, or the verb is without an object entirely, in which case it means 'for a people who have knowledge.'

The upshot of the first meaning is that God has shown special concern for the Arabs by revealing the Qur'an in Arabic, which is also the meaning intimated by the verse below: *Had We made it a foreign Qur'an, they would have surely said, "Why have not its signs been articulated?" "What! Foreign and Arabic!?"* (41:44). Also of similar meaning to this is the verse: *Had We sent it down upon some non-Arab and had he recited it to them,*

they would not have believed in it (26:199).

This meaning does not contradict the universality of the Prophet's mission to all humankind, because the progress of his mission consisted of multiple stages. The first time he publicly preached to people was during the pilgrimage season, but they vehemently rejected his message. After this, he preached to people in secret for a time. Then, he was instructed by God to preach to his closest relatives, as we can see in the verse: *Warn the nearest of your kinsfolk*' (26:214). Then, God bade him to preach to his people, as per the verse: *So proclaim what you have been commanded, and turn away from the polytheists* (15:94). Finally, he was commanded to preach His message to all of humankind, as we see in the verse: *Say, "O mankind! I am the Messenger of Allah to you all…!"* (7:158), and in the verse: *…and this Qur'an has been revealed to me that I may warn thereby you and whomever it may reach…* (6:19).

Furthermore, it is a matter of historical record that the Prophet's followers included non-Arabs such as Salmān, who was Persian, Bilāl, who was Ethiopian, and Ṣuhayb, who was Roman. History also records that the Prophet preached to the Jewish tribes of Arabia, and the events that transpired between him and them are well-known. In addition, he sent letters to the rulers of Persia, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Rome, calling on them to accept the new faith. All of this points to the universality of his message.

بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا فَأَعْرَضَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ فَهُمْ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ ﴿٤﴾

(41:4) ***a bearer of good news and a warner. But most of them turn away [from it], [and] so they do not hear.***

A bearer of good news and a warner is an adverbial phrase that refers to the *Book* mentioned in the previous verse. The meaning of *they do not hear* in this verse, as indicated by the fact they are described as turning away, is that they do not pay attention to what is being said.

وَقْرٌ وَمِنْ بَيْنِنَا وَبَيْنِكَ حِجَابٌ فَاعْمَلْ إِنَّنَا عَامِلُونَ ﴿٥﴾

(41:5) ***They say, "Our hearts are in veils [which shut them off] from what you invite us to, and there is a deafness in our ears, and there is a curtain between us and you. So act; we too are acting."***

Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī says *kann* (pl. *akinna*, translated as veils') is that in which a thing is protected, a *kinān* is a cover which envelops a thing, and the plural is *akinna* on the same pattern as *ghitāʾ* and *aghṭiya*, as God

says: "*Our hearts are in veils from what you invite us to….*"

Based on this, when the Qur'an quotes the disbelievers saying that their hearts are in veils, it means that their hearts are such that they do not understand the Prophet's message of divine unicity, as though they were so wrapped up that nothing could penetrate them from outside.

As for the phrase: *and there is a deafness in our ears*, it means as though there is a physical blockage that prevents them from hearing the Prophet's preaching. Then, the phrase *and there is a curtain between us*, means that there is a barrier that keeps us back from you, such that we cannot agree with anything that you say. In other words, they are telling the Prophet that he should give up hope of them ever accepting his invitation because, according to them, first of all, their hearts are covered by veils that mean his preaching cannot reach them in order for them to even comprehend it; second, their ears are closed up so that they cannot hear his preaching and none of his glad tidings of reward for the faithful or warnings of divine punishment for the faithless can enter them; and, third, there is a barrier set up between him and them which means that they can never find any common ground with him whatsoever. Together, these convey the utter futility of his preaching to them.

So act; we too are acting: This is the logical conclusion drawn from what has just been said, and it contains an implied threat. The meaning, therefore, is that if there is no way for us to understand one another, then do whatever you can to prove us wrong and we will do likewise to prove you wrong.

Some have suggested that the meaning is: 'So act according to what your faith requires, we too are acting according to what ours requires.'

Others have said that it means: 'So do whatever you can to destroy us, as we are doing whatever we can to destroy you.'

However, both of these readings are far from the apparent meaning of the text.

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَا إِلَٰهُكُمْ إِلَٰهٌ وَاحِدٌ فَاسْتَقِيمُوا إِلَيْهِ وَاسْتَغْفِرُوهُ ۗ وَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُشْرِكِينَ ۝٦ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ كَافِرُونَ ۝٧

(41:6-7) ***Say, "I am just a human being like you. It has been revealed to me that your Allah is the One Allah. So be steadfast toward Him and plead to Him for forgiveness." And woe to the***

polytheists, those who do not pay the zakat, and they disbelieve in the Hereafter.

This verse [41:6] contains the response to the statement of the disbelievers in the previous verse: *Our hearts are in veils*…. Based on the context, its core message is: Tell them: "I am just a human being like you. I associate with you just as you associate with one another, and I speak with you just as you speak to one another. I am not from a different species of creature to you, such as an angel, such that there would be any barrier between me and you, that my words could not penetrate your ears, or that their meaning would not reverberate in your hearts. The only difference is that what I tell you and what I call you towards is a revelation that has been revealed to me, namely that your God, the One who is worthy of your worship, is but a single deity and not multiple gods."

So be steadfast toward Him: Meaning, that if there is only One God, and this God has no partners, then behave properly towards Him by affirming His oneness and negating all partners from Him, and seek His forgiveness for the idolatry and sins you have committed previously.

And woe to the polytheists: This is a warning to the idol worshippers who assign partners to God and do not affirm His oneness. Here, the Qur'an singles out the idol worshippers with two of their most distinctive features: They do not give 'zakat,' and they disbelieve in the hereafter.

The meaning of 'zakat' here is any kind of charitable giving to the poor and needy for the sake of God, as the duty of zakat in the sense of obligatory almsgiving in Islam had not yet been legislated when this chapter of the Qur'an had been revealed, and this appears to be one of the oldest Meccan chapters.

Some have said that the meaning of *pay the zakat* here is cleansing and purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) from the filth and pollution of sins and nurturing it to health and prosperity through worshipping God. This is a good interpretation, so long as *pay the zakat* can be understood in this sense.

And they disbelieve in the hereafter: This is another description of the idolaters, which is the logical corollary of their denial of the resurrection. It is for this reason that the Qur'an uses the pronoun *they* separately in order to emphasise that they are defined by their disbelief in the hereafter.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ ﴿٨﴾

(41:8) ***As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds, there***

will be an everlasting reward for them.'

According to some scholars, 'an everlasting reward' (*ajr gayr mamnūn*) means that it will never come to an end, but rather will be continuous and unceasing. Others, however, have said that *ghayr mamnūn* means that it is uncountable, in a similar vein to the verse: …*provided therein without any reckoning* (40:40).

The meaning of *ghayr mamnūn* could also be that this reward is given freely without any reproach or condescension (*mann*) which would otherwise sully the act of giving. Such a reading might be supported by the fact that the verse refers to what they are given as a 'reward' (*ajr*), which suggests that they are deserving of what God gives them on account of their faith and righteous deeds. However, even this deservingness of reward is ultimately something that is given to them by God rather than something they have given to themselves, as God says elsewhere: *This is indeed your reward, and your endeavour has been well-appreciated*' (76:22).

قُلْ أَئِنَّكُمْ لَتَكْفُرُونَ بِالَّذِي خَلَقَ الْأَرْضَ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ وَتَجْعَلُونَ لَهُ أَنْدَادًا ۚ ذَٰلِكَ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٩﴾

(41:9) *Say, "Do you really disbelieve in Him who created the earth in two days, and ascribe partners to Him? That is the Lord of all the worlds!"*

Having refuted the disbelievers' claim that *Our hearts are in veils…*, above, God now commands the Prophet to ask the disbelievers whether they will still insist on assigning partners to Him in spite of the manifest signs of His oneness in the creation of the heavens and the earth and His direction of them both.

This is a rhetorical question intended to express amazement, which is why the question 'Do you really…?' (*a innakum la-takfurūn*) is accompanied in Arabic with the particles of emphasis *inna* and *la* (translated as 'really'). This is as though to say it is beyond belief that anyone would deny God or associate partners with Him when there is such clear and indisputable proof to the contrary on offer.

…and ascribe partners to Him?—is an explanation of *Do you really disbelieve in Him who created the earth…*, and 'partners' (*andād*) is the plural of *nidd*, which literally means 'likeness.' Hence, the meaning of *ascribe partners* here is to associate partners with Him who resemble Him in lordship and divinity.

That is the Lord of all the worlds! The indicative pronoun 'that' (*dhālika*), which usually signifies something distant, is used here to emphasise God's lofty position and His being exalted above such fanciful delusions. He is the Lord of the Worlds and the director of all affairs, so it is inconceivable that there could be a lord or a god other than Him.

The meaning of 'day' (*yawm*) in the passage *who created the earth in two days* is of a period of time. It does not denote the literal day of twenty-four hours with which we are familiar through our life on this planet, where a day refers to a single rotation of the earth on its axis, as this meaning clearly cannot apply in the context of the current verse. The use of 'day' to refer to a time period that contains a significant event is widespread in the Arabic language, hence why God says: *and We make such days rotate among mankind* (3:130), and *Do they await anything except the like of the days of those who passed away before them?* (10:102).

Therefore, the 'two days' in which God created the earth are, in fact, two periods of time in which the creation of the earth was completed fully. God says that there were two days rather than one to show that the formation of the earth took place across two distinct stages, such as one stage of rawness and another of ripening, or one of being molten and another of solidifying.

وَجَعَلَ فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ مِنْ فَوْقِهَا وَبَارَكَ فِيهَا وَقَدَّرَ فِيهَا أَقْوَاتَهَا فِي أَرْبَعَةِ أَيَّامٍ سَوَاءً لِلسَّائِلِينَ ﴿١٠﴾

(41:10) ***And he made in it firmly set [mountains] [rising] above it, and blessed it and ordained therein its [various] means of sustenance in four days, alike for all the seekers [of the means of sustenance].'***

This verse is linked by *And* to the sentence: *Him who created the earth in two days…* and there is no harm in the passage *and ascribe partners to Him? That is the Lord of all the worlds* intervening between the two sentences, because the first sentence is an exposition of *Do you really disbelieve…?* while the second emphasizes the amazement expressed in the form of the rhetorical question.

'Firmly set' (*rawāsī*) is an adjective whose noun is implicit, namely *firmly set* mountains, meaning that they are fixed upon the earth. The five occurrences of the pronoun 'it' (*hā*, which is grammatically feminine singular) throughout this verse all refer back to *the earth* in the previous verse.

…*and blessed it*—meaning He filled it with abundant goodness to provide all manner of benefits to all of the living beings who dwell upon it, whether plants, animals, or humankind.

…and ordained therein its means of sustenance in four days, alike for all the seekers…: Some have said that the adverbial phrase *in four days* is counting from the beginning of creation. In other words, it includes the two days that had already elapsed for the creation of the earth: God created the earth in two days, then He ordained the means of sustenance therein in two days, and this makes a total of four days.

Others have said that both the creation of the earth and the ordinance of sustenance took place in a total of four days, such that the two processes were running in parallel rather than one after another.

Others still have said that four days is the duration in which all the events mentioned in the verse took place, including the creation of mountains upon the earth, blessing it, and ordaining sustenance therein. However, this reading involves positing a lot of implicit meanings within the verse.

According to al-Zamakhsharī, writing in *al-Kashshāf*, the adverbial phrase *in four days* is linked to an implicit sentence consisting of a subject and a predicate, namely: All of that happened *in four days*, as if to say: 'The earth was created in two days, and the provisions and other things it contains were created in two days, so all of that was created in a total of four days.'

Commentators have argued that the verse cannot be read to mean that the events it describes (such as the creation of the mountains and the ordainment of provisions) took place in the space of four days in addition to the two days for the creation of the earth, because this would make a total of six days for the creation of the earth and its contents, and a subsequent verse says that the heavens were created in two days (41:12). Read in this way, these verses would mean that creation took a total of eight days (two for the creation of the earth, four for its contents, and two for the heavens), when God has repeatedly stated in the Qur'an that the creation of the heavens and the earth took a total of six. On this basis, they say, it is necessary to adopt the aforementioned reading of *four days*, where this includes the two days for the creation of the earth, even if this requires us to posit some implicit terms and meanings within the verse.

However, if we are being truthful, the apparent meaning of verse … *and ordained therein its means of sustenance in four days, alike for all the seekers…* does not accord with what the above commentators have said.

Instead, the context of the verse suggests that *four days* means that provisions were ordained in four periods of time, namely the four seasons that are caused by the shifting position of the sun in the sky over the course of the year. Therefore, *four days* here refers to the four seasons.

The verses here say that the heavens and the earth were created in four days: Two for the creation of the earth, and two for fashioning of the heavens into seven heavens after they were smoke. As for the days relating to provisions, these are the days in which they were ordained rather than the days in which they were created. Equally, the frequent refrain that the heavens and the earth were created in six days refers only to their creation and does not include the ordination of their affairs. Therefore, the correct opinion is that the adverbial phrase *in four days* only qualifies the latter most sentence, namely *and ordained therein its means of sustenance* without there being any implicit terms or phrases in the verse. The goal of this verse is to expound that the provisions and sustenance of the earth were ordained through the four seasons of the year.

There are several possibilities for the phrase, …*alike for all the seekers*: First, it could be an absolute object (*mafʿūl muṭlaq*) for an implicit verb: being equal. This would render the meaning, means of sustenance that is equal and alike for all the seekers.

Second, it could be an adverbial phrase that qualifies *means of sustenance*, in which case it means God ordained them to be equally divided amongst all seekers, such that each is sufficed without excess or shortfall.'

'The seekers' (*sāʾilīn*) here are the plants, animals, and human beings, for all of them are in need of provisions and sustenance for their survival, and thus they are seeking or asking for sustenance from their Lord.[1] As God says: *Everyone in the heavens and the earth asks Him* (55:29), and: *and He gave you all that you had asked Him* (14:34).

ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ وَهِيَ دُخَانٌ فَقَالَ لَهَا وَلِلْأَرْضِ ائْتِيَا طَوْعًا أَوْ كَرْهًا قَالَتَا أَتَيْنَا طَائِعِينَ ﴿١١﴾

1 Even though at first glance these verses appear to be referring to rational beings, but a closer inspection—especially in the case of the second verse—reveals that the meaning of seeking' here is the state of neediness and potentiality. Therefore, the verses include plants and animals, while the masculine plural pronoun (which would normally be reserved for rational beings) is used here rhetorically (for *taghlīb*). (Trans.)

(41:11) ***Then He turned to the heaven, and it was smoke, and He said to it and to the earth, "Come! Willingly or unwillingly!" They said, "We come willingly."***

According to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, when the verb *istawā*ʾ is made transitive with the preposition *ʿalā* ('on'), it gives the meaning of to 'take possession of' or 'to gain mastery over' (*istīlā*ʾ), as in the verse *the All-beneficent, settled on the Throne* (20:5). On the other hand, if it is made transitive with the preposition *ilā* ('to'), then it means 'to turn towards' (as in the present verse).

Also in al-Rāghib's *Mufradāt*, we read that *karh* (here translated as 'unwillingly') refers to a difficulty imposed on the human being externally in order to compel him to do something, while *kurh* (with a *u* instead of an *a* on the *kāf*) refers to a difficulty that emanates from within the human being.

Based on the above, *Then He turned to the heaven* means that He directed His attention towards them in the sense of their creation, not in the sense of their location, as the latter would imply that God was turning from one direction to another or moving from one place to another, when He exists beyond place.

The verse appears to begin with 'Then' (*thumma*) to show that the creation of the heavens happened after that of the earth. However, some have said that the delay marked by *thumma* here is not a delay between the events being related themselves but in the relation of those events to the audience in the Qur'an. This reading is supported by the verses: *…or the sky which He has built… and after that He spread out the earth, and brought forth from it its water and pastures, and set firm the mountains…* (79:27–32), as a literal reading of *after* here would indicate that the earth was created after the heavens, rather than the other way around.

However, one might object that this refers to the 'spreading out' of the earth being subsequent to the 'building' of the heavens, and 'spreading out' (*daḥw*) the earth is not the same as 'creating' (*khalq*) it. After all, after the spreading out of the earth, God mentions the bringing forth of water, pastures, and mountains, which corresponds to the process described by the phrase *And He made in it firmly set [mountains], and blessed it and ordained therein its [various] means of sustenance in four days…* in the previous verse, which is mentioned as distinct from the creation of the heavens and the earth. Therefore, these verses from Sūrah al-Nāziʿāt provide no basis for arguing that *thumma* here means anything other than the fact that the heavens were created after the earth. After all, it is even

more apparent that the phrase 'after that' (*baʿd dhālik*) signifies a temporal delay than that 'then' (*thumma*) does in the present chapter.

…and it was smoke… is an adverbial qualifier for *the heaven*, meaning that when God turned to heaven to create it, it was a substance that God refers to as 'smoke' (*dukhān*). This 'smoke' is pure matter, to which God gave form, and decreed that it should become seven heavens, whereas previously the heavens were without number, and one was indistinguishable from another. That is why He uses the singular term 'heaven' (*samāʾ*) rather than 'heavens' (*samawāt*).

…and He said to it and to the earth, "Come! Willingly or unwillingly!": This follows on from His turning His attention towards heaven, and this is still unmistakably about the act of creation. Hence, when He says to the heaven and the earth: "*Come! Willingly or unwillingly!*" this is the word of origination and the creative command, as with His saying to something "Be!" in the verse: *All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it "Be!" and it is* (36:82).

The exchange that takes place between God on the one hand saying: *Come!*, and the heaven and the earth on the other saying: *We come…* presents an allegorical representation of the creative act that is intended to make this comprehensible to ordinary folk in everyday language. However, it also reflects the deeper reality that all entities possess some degree of knowledge and that all beings can be endowed with speech in a way that befits their condition and, as a result, God can converse with them. We have discussed this to some extent already, and we will discuss it further when we reach the verse: *They will say, "We were given speech by Allah, who gave speech to all things*," below (41:21).

Some have said that when God says *Come…!* this is a command for them to reveal their latent qualities and benefits, which is distinct from the command for them to come into being and exist. However, this reading is rejected on the basis that the creation of the heavens will be mentioned subsequently, and it does not make sense that God would command them to reveal their latent qualities and benefits before the heavens had even come into being.

Some say that *Come! Willingly or unwillingly!* is a figurative representation of God's irresistible power over the heaven and the earth and the impossibility of their defying that, and that it does not establish either their obedience or God's compulsion of them. However, this is refuted by the next phrase: *They said, "We come willingly,"* as were the choice *Willingly or unwillingly* purely figurative, then there would have been no sense in

the heaven and the earth affirming their obedience in response to it.

"*We come willingly*" is the response of the heaven and the earth to the choice given to them by God, and they choose to come willingly. The word *willingly* (ṭāʾiʿīn) takes a form usually reserved for intelligent beings (that is, that of the third-person masculine plural) because it is in the context of an address and a response, both of which are actions unique to intelligent beings. They used the plural rather than the dual form for *willingly* possibly in order to show their humility by counting themselves no different from any other of God's creatures, all of whom are obedient to His command, and hence they used the plural to refer to themselves, even though they are a pair. This is akin to the verse: *You alone do we worship, and to You alone do we appeal for help* (1:5).

Why are heaven and the earth addressed together—with the phrase *Come!*—and why do they respond together, even though their creation and the management of their affairs are mentioned separately in the previous verses? This seems to suggest that there is an ontological relationship between them and that they share a special connection in the cosmic order that governs both of them. And this is indeed the case, as different parts of the cosmos affect and influence one another.

When God says *and He said to it and to the earth*, this alludes, in any case, to the fact that *then* in the phrase *Then He turned to the heaven* signifies a passage of time between the two events.

فَقَضَاهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ وَأَوْحَىٰ فِي كُلِّ سَمَاءٍ أَمْرَهَا ۚ وَزَيَّنَّا
السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِمَصَابِيحَ وَحِفْظًا ۚ ذَٰلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ ﴿١٢﴾

(41:12) *Then He set them up as seven heavens in two days, and revealed in each heaven its ordinance. We have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps and guarded them. That is the ordaining of the All-mighty, the All-knowing.*

The original meaning of *qaḍāʾ* (translated here as *set up*) is to separate one thing from another, and the pronoun 'them' (*hunna*—third-person feminine plural) refers to the heavens, while *seven heavens* is an adverb for *them*. The phrase *in two days* qualifies the verb of *He set them up*. Taken together, this sentence means that when God turned toward the heavens they were smoke, meaning they were raw unformed potentiality, then God determined their affair by making them into seven heavens in two days.

Some have said that the meaning of *qaḍāʾ* in this verse means 'to make,'

which would entail that *seven heavens* was the second object of the verb. Other grammatical analyses of the verse have also been proposed, but we will omit these for the sake of brevity.

Both this verse and the one before it are concerned with expounding what was left ambiguous in the verse: *Have the faithless not regarded that the heavens and the earth were interwoven and We unravelled them…?* (21:30).

…and revealed in each heaven its ordinance: Some say that this means God revealed to each heaven its capacities or the qualities that God's wisdom had ordained for it, such as the existence of angels, celestial bodies, and the like thereof within it. 'Revealed' (*waḥī*) here refers to creation and origination. This sentence follows on from *He set them up…*, which shows that this was happening at the same time as the creation of seven heavens, meaning that as God created each of the heavens, he populated it with angels, celestial bodies, and other denizens.

As I'm sure you can see, the claim that *revealed* refers to creation and that 'ordinance' (*amr*) means the denizens of the heavens, such as angels and celestial bodies, can only be accepted on the basis of clear evidence, as does the claim that this was concomitant with the process being described by the phrase *He set them up*….

Some say that the 'ordinance' (*amr*) mentioned here refers to the responsibilities imposed on the angelic denizens of each heaven, while *revealed* here is used in the conventional sense of divine revelation. This would render the meaning: And He revealed to the angels who inhabited each heaven the acts of worship He had prescribed for them to perform.'

However, this does not accord with the apparent meaning of the verse, as God says that He revealed *in each heaven* rather than 'to each heaven.'

It is also been suggested that the meaning of its *ordinance* here is what God wanted from it. However, in reality, this interpretation devolves to one of the two aforementioned possibilities: Either revelation signifies creation and origination, in which case it accords with the first meaning, or revelation signifies its conventional meaning, in which case it accords with the second.

However, what God has said elsewhere about the divine ordinance that pertains to the heavens suggests a meaning that is far more subtle than anything others have proposed: *He directs the command from the heaven to the earth; then it ascends toward Him…* (32:5); and: *It is Allah who has created seven heavens, and of the earth [a number] similar to them. The command gradually descends through them…* (62:12); and: *Certainly*

We created above you the seven ways and We have not been oblivious of creation (23:17).

The first of these verses indicates that the heavens represent the point of origin for the divine command, which descends to the earth; the second verse indicates that this command descends from one heaven to another until it reaches the earth; and the third verse indicates that the heavens are ways (*ṭarāʾiq*) for the command to traverse from the Lord of the Throne, or for the angels to traverse bearing this command to the earth, as God alludes to in the verse: *In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, with every command* (97:4); and in the verse: *Every definitive command is resolved in it* (44:4).

If what was meant by this command (*amr*) was the creative command (*al-amr al-takwīnī*)—which is the word of origination referred to in the verse *All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it "Be," and it is* (36:82)—then, put beside one another, these verses show that the divine command that descends to the terrestrial realm—and, in doing so, causes things to exist and events to transpire—is borne by the angels from the Lord of the Throne and carried by them through the paths of the heavens—descending through the heavens one after another—until it reaches the earth.

And it is carried through each heaven by the angels who inhabit that heaven, as we can deduce from the verse: *When fear is lifted from their hearts, they say, "What did your Lord say?" They say, "The truth, and He is the All-exalted, the All-great"* (34:23). And we have already discussed this and how the heavens are the abode of the angels, a fact alluded to by the verses: *How many an angel there is in the heavens…* (53:26) and on the verse: *They do not eavesdrop on the Supernal Elite but are shot at from every side* (37:8).

Therefore, the divine command is related to each of the heavens in terms of the angels who inhabit it, and in relation to each class of angels in terms of their bearing it. Hence, insofar as God burdened the angels with carrying this command, it is His revelation to them, for He also referred to this command as a form of speech: *All that We say to a thing, when We will it, is to say to it "Be!" and it is.* (16:40)

From the above, we can conclude that the meaning of the phrase *and revealed in each heaven its ordinance* is that God revealed the divine command in each of these heavens, and the divine command for each of the heavens was directed to its inhabitants, meaning the angels who were assigned to it.

Given that the seven heavens were created in two days, does this also mean that this command was revealed in two days? There is no evidence for such a claim in the text of the verse.

We have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps and guarded them. That is the ordaining of the All-mighty, the All-knowing: It is referred to as the 'lowest heaven' (*dunyā*) to indicate that it is the nearest of the heavens to the earth, while the heavens themselves are arranged one above the other in layers, as God says elsewhere: *He created seven heavens in layers* (67:3).

The apparent meaning of adorning the heavens with lamps—which is a reference to the celestial bodies, as per the verse: *Indeed We have adorned the lowest heaven with the finery of the stars* (37:6)—is that these celestial bodies in the lowest heaven or even beneath it are like hanging candles. And were these celestial bodies scattered throughout all of the heavens, without any barrier or obstruction between them because of the transparency of the heavens, as some have suggested, then they would have been an ornament for all of the heavens rather than only one of them, which is what the context indicates here. Therefore, there is no basis to the claim that they are ornaments for all of the heavens; they are seen to sparkle in the lowest of the heavens and, therefore, they are considered to be an ornament for it.

As for the verse *Have you not seen how Allah has created seven heavens in layers, and has made therein the moon for a light, and the sun for a lamp?* (71:15–16), the moon was made a light and the sun was made a lamp in relation to we who dwell on the earth and seek their illumination by day and night (rather than for the seven heavens as a whole), as God says elsewhere: *and make a radiant lamp*? (78:13).

As for *and guarded them*, this means to have guarded them from the devils, as per the verse: *and We have guarded them from every outcast Satan, except someone who may eavesdrop, whereat there pursues him a manifest flame* (15:17–18).

And as for *That is the ordaining of the All-mighty, the All-knowing*, this is to highlight the sublime order and design visible in what has just been described.

Conclusion

From the above, we can conclude the following:

First, that the apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*) of the verse—though not the explicit meaning (*naṣṣ*)—suggests that the lowest of the seven heavens is the realm of the stars and planets we see above us.

Second, that these seven heavens are all physical realms arranged one above the other like seven layers above the material realm. And the nearest of these seven heavens to us is the one that contains the stars and planets. The Qur'an has not described any of the other six heavens except for the fact that they are like layers.

Third, the phrase *seven heavens* does not refer to the heavenly bodies, whether in full or in part, such as the Sun, the Moon, and so on.

Fourth, that what has been said concerning the heavens—that they are the abode of the angels, that they descend through these heavens burdened with God's command and ascend through them with the records of our deeds, and that the heavens have gates that do not open for the faithless, and that things and provisions descend from these gates, and other such details that are found scattered throughout verses and narrations—reveals that these matters are connected to the heavens, but not in the same way that celestial bodies are fixed in their physical locations in accordance with the divinely instituted cosmic order, in such a way that allows for change and alteration.

This is because today we know that these celestial bodies—whatever they are—are material entities that are subject to the same physical laws and forces that govern the terrestrial realm. Meanwhile, the system that governs the heavens, their inhabitants, and the events that take place therein—such as those described above—is fundamentally distinct from the system that governs the material realm. To this can be added what has been said regarding the angels being created from light, that their food is worship, and the descriptions given of their creation, and what has come down concerning the creation of the heavens and their denizens.

Therefore, the angels inhabit seven supernal realms (*ʿawālim malakūtiyya*), one above the other. The Qur'an refers to these as the *seven heavens* and likens their qualities and role to the heavens we can see in this world because of their loftiness and vastness in relation to the earth and in order to make this comprehensible to ordinary people.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Ibn Abī Shayba, ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd, Abū Yaʿlā, and al-Ḥākim narrate the following, which was deemed authentic by Ibn Mardawayh, Abū Naʿīm, and al-Bayhaqī—both in their respective books known as *Dalāʾil*—and Ibn ʿAsākir narrates the same from Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh:

The Quraysh assembled one day and said: 'See who amongst you

is most learned in magic, in soothsaying, and in poetry, and let this man who has divided our community, split our affair, and reviled our faith come forth, and let these learned ones speak to him and see how best to respond to him!'
They said: 'We know none other than ʿUtba b. Rabīʿa!'
So, they told him: 'It must be you, O Abā l-Walīd!'
So the Prophet came to him and he said: 'O Muḥammad, are you better or [your father] ʿAbd Allāh? Are you better or [your grandfather] ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib?'
The Messenger of God was silent.
So ʿUtba said: 'If you claim that they are better than you, then you should worship the same gods that they worshipped and stop reviling them. But, if you claim you are better than they, then speak, and let us hear what you have to say!
For, by God, we have not seen a more grievous weapon wielded against your people than you! You have divided our community, split our affair, and reviled our faith. You have disgraced us amongst the Arabs, to the extent that they say, "the Quraysh have a sorcerer in their midst!" or "the Quraysh have a soothsayer amongst them!" By God, we do not expect anything but a great commotion in which we turn our swords against one another. O man! If you are in need of money, we will gather for you our wealth and make you the richest man of the Quraysh! And if you are in need of a woman, then choose any woman of the Quraysh that you wish—in fact, we will give you ten!'
God's Messenger asked: 'Are you done?'
He said: 'Yes.'
Then God's Messenger recited: *In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the Most Merciful, Ḥā Mīm: A revelation sent down from the All-beneficent, the Most Merciful, a Book whose signs have been elaborated, an Arabic Qur'an, for a people who know…* until he reached the verse *…But if they turn away, say, "I warn you of a thunderbolt, like the thunderbolt of ʿĀd and Thamūd"* (41:1–13).
ʿUtba said: 'That's enough. Don't you have anything else to say?'
He said: 'No.'
So ʿUtba returned to the Quraysh, and they asked him, 'What happened?'
ʿUtba replied said: 'I think I told everything to him that you would have wanted to say, without leaving anything out!'

They asked, 'And did he give you an answer?'

He said: 'By the idol, I did not understand anything he said except this: "I warn you of a thunderbolt, like the thunderbolt of ʿĀd and Thamūd."'

They said, 'Woe to you! He spoke to you in Arabic, and yet you could not understand what he said?'

He said: 'No, by God, I understood nothing of his speech save his mention of the thunderbolt.'

Author's comments: Similar accounts have been narrated in other sources. In some versions, the Quraysh address him when he returns by saying: 'What news do you bring, O Abū al-Walīd?' And he responds by saying: 'By God, I have heard something the like of which I have never heard before! By God, it is neither poetry, nor magic, nor soothsaying! By God, some event will transpire from these words!' And other versions contain other details still.

Concerning his recitation of the verses of this chapter to al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra, there is another narration which we will discuss—God-willing—in our commentary on Sūrah al-Muddaththir, following the verse: *Leave Me [to deal] with him whom I created alone*' (74:11).

(2) Concerning the present passage of the Qur'an, Ibn Jarīr narrates from Abū Bakr that some Jews came to the Messenger of God and said: 'O Muḥammad, tell us: What parts of creation did God create in these six days?'

He responded: 'God created the earth on the Sunday and the Monday, then he created the mountains on the Tuesday, followed by cities—both built-up and ruined—foodstuffs, and rivers on the Wednesday. He created the heavens and the angels on Thursday. Then he created in three hours—on Friday, that is—in the first He created the appointed times of death, in the second he created disease, and in the third he created Adam.' They said: 'You have spoken the truth if you finish it!' Whereat the Prophet realized what they were after and became angry, so God sent down the verses: *…and no fatigue did touch Us. So be patient over what they say*… (50:38–39).

Author's comments: A similar account has been narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās and ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām, and from ʿIkrima and others, and it is also found in Shīʿī sources. When the Jewish interlocutors say, 'You have spoken the truth if you finish it!' they mean if he finishes his account by saying that God finished the creation on Saturday and rested on it.

However, there are some issues with these traditions:

First of all, they present the Jews as assenting to the account of the creation as laid out above, but this account explicitly contradicts the account presented in the Book of Genesis in the Torah, which says that God created the light and the darkness and the day and the night on the first day, then he created the heavens on the second day, followed by the earth, the seas, and the plants on the third day, then the sun, the moon, and the stars on the fourth day, followed by the beasts of the sea and the birds of the air on the fifth, then the animals on land and the human being on the sixth day (Friday). Then, on the seventh day (the Sabbath), God completed the creation and rested. This scheme of creation is clearly different from the one purportedly laid out by the Prophet in the above tradition.

Second, insofar as the days of the week—each of which consists of a day and a night—depend for their existence on the earth's rotation on its axis as it orbits the sun, how can the earth have been created on the first two days of the week while the heavens and their contents did not yet exist and, hence, the earth could not have been moving? A similar objection can be raised about the creation of the heavens and their denizens, including the sun, insofar as there can be no day if there is no sun.

Third, the scheme of creation found in this narration sets aside a day for the creation of the mountains, while empirical scientific research has shown that these formed gradually. A similar objection can be made about the creation of the cities, rivers, and foodstuffs.

(3) In *Rawḍat al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates from Muḥammad b. ʿAṭiyya from Abū Jaʿfar: 'And He created the substance from which all other substances derive—namely, water—and made everything depend on water, without making water depend on anything else. And he created the winds from water… then he gave the winds dominion over the water and they split the surface of the water so that as much foam as God willed was thrown up. From that foam, God created the land, barren and formless, with neither crack nor crevice, nor elevation, nor dip, nor vegetation of any kind, then He rolled it up and placed it above the water… then God created fire from the water, and the fire split the surface of the water, until as much vapor was thrown up as God willed. From that vapor, God created the heavens transparent and formless, with neither crack nor crevice. That is the meaning of God's words: "*or the sky which He has built*" (79:27).'

Author's comments: There are other narrations with a similar meaning

to this one. It is possible to apply these narrations, and indeed the verses of the Qur'an, to the results yielded by modern scientific investigations into the formation of the cosmos and its contents. However, we have avoided doing this here because we do not wish to reduce the realities of the Qur'an to the level of mere scientific conjectures or theories, unless these theories are indisputably true.

(4) In *Nahj al-Balāgha*, we read: 'Among the proofs of His creation is the creation of the heavens which are raised without pillars and stand without support. He called them and they responded obediently and humbly without being lazy or recalcitrant. If they had not acknowledged His divinity and obeyed Him, He would not have made them the place of His throne, the abode of His angels, and the destination to which ascend the pure utterances and the righteous deeds of the creatures.'

(5) And in *Kamāl al-Dīn*, al-Ṣadūq narrates from Fuḍayl al-Rassān: Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm wrote to Abū ʿAbd Allāh, and asked him: 'Inform us, what is your merit as the Prophet's Household (*ahl al-bayt*)?' So Abū ʿAbd Allāh replied: 'Surely the stars were made as a guarantee of safety for the inhabitants of the heavens, for if the stars were to vanish from the sky, the fate promised to the inhabitants of the heavens would surely come to pass. God's Messenger said: The people of my household are a guarantee of safety for my nation, for if the people of my household were to vanish from the earth, then the fate promised to my nation would surely come to pass.'

Author's comments: More than one narration has come down with this meaning.

(6) In *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Majlisī narrates from *Kitāb al-Ghārāt* via its chain of narration to Ibn Nubāta that the Commander of the Faithful was asked: 'What is the distance between the heavens and the earth?' He answered: 'The extent of sight and the prayer of the oppressed.'

Author's comments: This is an example of his eloquent speech, in which he refers to both the manifest and hidden aspects of the heavens, as we have already discussed.

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Verses 13 to 25

These verses warn their audience of a worldly punishment befalling them akin to that which befell the peoples of ʿĀd and Thamūd because they denied the divine messengers and rejected God's signs. They also warn them of the punishment of the hereafter, which will befall God's enemies amongst those who obstinately deny the truth, upon whom the verdict of punishment has been realized. These verses also explain how they have been led astray in this world and alludes to their limbs testifying against them for their crimes in the next.

فَإِنْ أَعْرَضُوا فَقُلْ أَنْذَرْتُكُمْ صَاعِقَةً مِثْلَ صَاعِقَةِ عَادٍ وَثَمُودَ ﴿١٣﴾

(41:13) ***But if they turn away, say, "I warn you of a thunderbolt, like the thunderbolt of ʿĀd and Thamūd."***

In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read that this is a thunderbolt (*ṣāʿiqa*) that will cause everything to perish.

Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī says:

> "One of the lexicographers says: 'Thunderbolts are of three kinds: Of death—as per the verses the Trumpet will be blown, and whoever is in the heavens will be struck (*ṣāʿiqa*) (39:68), and so the thunderbolt seized them (51:44)—of punishment—as per the verse I warn you of a thunderbolt, like the thunderbolt of ʿĀd and Thamūd—and of natural fire—as per the verse He releases the thunderbolts and strikes with them whomever He wishes (13:13).' However, these are classifications of thunderbolts based on their effects, for a thunderbolt is a tremendous explosion of the air, and it results in either just fire, punishment, or death, but the reality is that the thunderbolt in each case is one and the same and these are merely the different effects it can have."

Based on the above, the thunderbolt corresponds to the punishments of ʿĀd and Thamūd, which are described as a 'wind' (*rīḥ*) and a 'cry' (*ṣayḥa*), respectively. The use of the past tense (in Arabic) for 'I warn you' (*andhartu-kum*) shows that this is something that is sure to happen.

إِذْ جَاءَتْهُمُ الرُّسُلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا اللَّهَ ۖ

قَالُوا لَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّنَا لَأَنْزَلَ مَلَائِكَةً فَإِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ كَافِرُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

(41:14) ***When the messengers came to them, before them and behind them, saying, "Worship no one except Allah!" They said, "Had our Lord wished, He would certainly have sent down angels [to us]. We indeed disbelieve in what you have been sent with."***

This provides the context for the thunderbolt that struck ʿĀd and Thamūd, as to warn someone of a thunderbolt means to tell them that it will strike them. Therefore, the meaning here is: 'Just as the thunderbolt befell ʿĀd and Thamūd when the messengers came to them….'

Why does the Qur'an say that messengers (*rusul*)—in the plural—came to ʿĀd and Thamūd when their stories mention only two—Hūd and Ṣāliḥ—and hence it would have been more fitting to use the dual two messengers (*rasūlān*)? The plural is used here to show that all the messengers share a single call, and that when one messenger is sent to a people, it is as though they have been sent to all peoples. For the same reason, when a people deny one messenger, it is as though they have denied all the messengers. That is why God says *ʿĀd impugned the messengers* (26:133), *Thamūd impugned the messengers* (26:141), and *Lot's people impugned the messengers* (26:160)—amongst other examples—using the plural in each case.

Some have said that the plural messengers is used for Hūd and Ṣāliḥ, even though there are only two of them, because it is common to use the plural even for groups smaller than three, just as the verse says *When the messengers came to them* and 'them' (*hum*) is also a plural, even though it refers to the two peoples of ʿĀd and Thamūd. However, this is not a valid comparison, because ʿĀd and Thamūd, while being two nations, are comprised of a great many individuals and, therefore, it is appropriate to use the plural when referring to them.

…before them and behind them…: Meaning, from all directions; and it is common in Arabic to use these two directions to signify all directions. This could also mean '…in the past and in the present.' With this in mind, *When the messengers came to them, before them and from behind them…* means that they called them towards God in every possible way, privately and publicly, individually and collectively, with glad tidings and warnings, and that is why the verse clarifies what it was they brought with them in the subsequent phrase: *Worship no one except Allah!*, meaning that they tried from every possible angle to win their people to monotheism.

…They said, "Had our Lord wished, He would certainly have sent down angels…": They reject the message of the prophets by saying that if God had wanted to send a message to them, He would have sent an angel instead. As we have mentioned previously, the implication of this argument is that they reject the possibility of human prophethood.

"We indeed disbelieve in what you have been sent with": This is the conclusion they draw from the above claim, namely: 'Therefore, God has neither wished to send a message, nor has He sent a message, so we disbelieve in that with which you were sent'—namely, monotheism.

فَأَمَّا عَادٌ فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَقَالُوا مَنْ أَشَدُّ مِنَّا قُوَّةً ۖ أَوَلَمْ
يَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ الَّذِي خَلَقَهُمْ هُوَ أَشَدُّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً ۖ وَكَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يَجْحَدُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

(41:15) ***As for [the people of] Ad, they acted arrogantly in the earth unduly, and they said, "Who is more powerful than us?" Did they not see that Allah, who created them, is more powerful than them? They used to impugn Our signs;***

The chapter now returns to discussing what befell each of the two peoples of ʿĀd and Thamūd as a result of their disbelief. 'Unduly' (*bi ghayr al-ḥaqq*) expounds the meaning of the phrase *they acted arrogantly*, because arrogance is always undue by definition.

فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا صَرْصَرًا فِي أَيَّامٍ نَحِسَاتٍ لِنُذِيقَهُمْ عَذَابَ الْخِزْيِ
فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۖ وَلَعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةِ أَخْزَىٰ ۖ وَهُمْ لَا يُنْصَرُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

(41:16) ***so We unleashed upon them a violent gale during ill-fated days, that We might make them taste the punishment of disgrace in the life of the world. Yet the punishment of the Hereafter is surely more disgraceful, and they will not be helped.***

The 'violent gale' (*rīḥ ṣarṣar*) in this verse has been interpreted variously to mean an intense and toxic wind, an extremely cold wind, or a wind so powerfully destructive as to be deafening. Meanwhile, as the antonym of 'felicitious' (*saʿd*), 'ill-fated' (*naḥis*) signifies misfortune and misery. Hence, *ill-fated days* are ominous and filled with bad news.

Some say that 'ill-fated days' (*ayyām naḥisāt*) refers to those days in which the dust thrown into the air is so thick that people cannot see one another. This is supported by the verse in Sūrah al-Aḥqāf: *When they saw*

it as a cloud advancing toward their valleys, they said, "This cloud brings us rain." "Rather it is what you sought to hasten: a hurricane carrying a painful punishment" (46:24).

…and they will not be helped means that there will be no saviour to save them, nor intercessor to intercede for them. The remainder of the verse's meaning is clear.

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وَأَمَّا ثَمُودُ فَهَدَيْنَاهُمْ فَاسْتَحَبُّوا الْعَمَىٰ عَلَى الْهُدَىٰ فَأَخَذَتْهُمْ صَاعِقَةُ الْعَذَابِ الْهُونِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

(41:17) ***As for [the people of] Thamūd, We guided them, but they preferred blindness to guidance. So the bolt of a humiliating punishment seized them because of what they used to earn.'***

'Guidance' here means that they were shown the right path, led to the truth, and that the realities of faith and practice were made clear to them. Meanwhile, to prefer' means to desire and choose one thing over another. *Blindness* is a metaphor for 'error' (*ḍalāla*), which is the opposite of 'guidance' (*hudā*). This further implies that guidance is a form of sight, just as error is a form of blindness. Note that the Arabic literally reads 'a humiliation punishment' (*ʿadhāb hūn*), which serves to emphasise its severity.

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Hence, the meaning of this verse is as follows: As for the people of Thamūd, we showed them the right path and taught them guidance by distinguishing it from error. But they chose error, which is blindness to guidance, which is itself sight. So they were seized by the cry of a humiliating punishment as a recompense for what they had earned.

وَنَجَّيْنَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَكَانُوا يَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

(41:18) ***And We delivered those who had faith and were Godwary.***

Here, Godwariness is joined to faith with the phrase 'and were Godwary' (*wa kānū yattaqūn*) to show that they were continuously Godwary, that they combined their faith with righteous deeds, and that this was the reason they were saved from being annihilated by divine punishment. This is on the basis of God's promise, elsewhere: *and it was a must for Us to help the faithful* (30:47).

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And it appears that this verse is connected to both the stories of ʿĀd and Thamūd together and serves as a conclusion for them, even if most commentators have connected it only to the second and not the first.

وَيَوْمَ يُحْشَرُ أَعْدَاءُ اللَّهِ إِلَى النَّارِ فَهُمْ يُوزَعُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

(41:19) ***The day when the enemies of Allah are marched out toward the Fire, and they shall be held in check.***

To be marched out (*ḥashr*) means to force a group of people from their homes in order to fight or for some other reason; this is according to al-Rāghib. To be 'held in check' means to detain those at the front of a group of people so that those behind them can catch up and join them as one.

Some have said the meaning of *marched out toward the fire* is that they will be marched out for the Resurrection in order to be questioned and judged, and that the fire' is mentioned here because it is the ultimate goal of this process and their final destination. The evidence for this view is that the subsequent verses describe their limbs being made to testify against them, which happens before they are consigned to hell.

Others have said that the meaning of *marched out toward the fire* is that they are being sent to hell and that it is possible that their limbs will be made to testify against them a second time; once when they are standing for Judgment and once when they are on the brink of hell.

The phrase 'enemies of God' (*aʿdāʾ Allāh*)—according to some—are those idolaters who denied the Prophet from amongst his own people, rather than all of the disbelievers. The evidence for this view is the verse below: *and the word became due against them, as it did against the nations that passed away before them* (41:25).

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا مَا جَاءُوهَا شَهِدَ عَلَيْهِمْ سَمْعُهُمْ وَأَبْصَارُهُمْ وَجُلُودُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(41:20) ***When they come to it, their hearing will bear witness against them and their sight and their skins concerning what they used to do'***

The witnessing of a person's limbs and faculties against them on the Day of Judgment means that they recount and enumerate the sins their owner performed with them in his or her worldly life. This means that these limbs had their own awareness in this world because, if God only granted these limbs their own sense and speech on the Day of Judgment or created a voice for them that recounts these deeds without their having

any sense, neither of these scenarios could be called bearing witness,' nor would this constitute irrefutable proof of guilt for a servant who denied their own culpability, as should be obvious.

Based on this, the error of the following claim is evident: That bearing witness' here means that on the Day of Judgment God will endow these limbs with knowledge and give them the power of speech so that they can report the sins of their owner. Equally erroneous is the claim that God will create sounds for them with the appearance of voices, or the claim that the meaning of bearing witness' does not refer to the literal speech of their limbs but to them confessing which sins they committed and how and when.

The apparent meaning of this verse is that the hearing and the sight will confess to what they have perceived, even if it is not a sin in whose commission they have been involved. For example, the hearing might testify to the fact that it heard the signs of God being recited but that its owner turned away from them or that it heard its owner utter a blasphemy. Equally, the sight might testify that it saw signs that attested to the oneness of God but that its owner turned away from them or that it saw its owner listening to backbiting or some other form of forbidden conversation. In this case, this verse is similar in meaning to the verse: *Indeed the hearing, the eyesight, and the heart all of these are accountable* (17:36).

According to this reading, the hearing, the sight, and the skin will testify to different things on the Day of Resurrection; the hearing and the sight will bear witness to the servant's sins, even if they did not directly participate in them, while the skin will testify to the sins to which it was a party through touch. That is why the sinners specifically address their skins in the subsequent verse: *Why did you bear witness against us?* (41:21).

Based on the apparent meaning of the verse, the meaning of 'skins' (*julūd*) here is the entirety of the skin. It will bear witness to all manner of sins and forbidden enjoyments to which it was a party, such as fornication and the like. It is also possible to include the testimony of other limbs within that of skins here, such as the testimony of the hands and the feet, which is mentioned in the verse: *Today We shall seal their mouths, and their hands shall speak to Us, and their feet shall bear witness…* (36:65).

Some have said the meaning of 'skins' is specifically the private parts, but that they are referred to as skins out of politeness.

وَقَالُوا لِجُلُودِهِمْ لِمَ شَهِدْتُمْ عَلَيْنَا ۖ قَالُوا أَنْطَقَنَا اللَّهُ الَّذِي أَنْطَقَ كُلَّ
شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ خَلَقَكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

(41:21) ***They will say to their skins, "Why did you bear witness against us?" They will say, "We were given speech by Allah, who gave speech to all things." He created you the first time, and to Him you are being brought back.***

They object to their own skins and rebuke them for testifying against them. Some have said this question is an expression of astonishment, as they are asking for an explanation in order to alleviate their shock, and they only address their skins rather than their hearing or their sights—even though both of these senses also testify against them—because their skins are testifying something to which they were a direct participant, while the sight and the hearing were merely observers and they are testifying to sins they saw others commit.

Others have said that the sinners are portrayed as specifically addressing their own skins in order to revile and shame them further, especially if skin here is being used as an allusion to their private parts.

They will say, "We were given speech by Allah, who gave speech to all things": Here, the limbs and faculties are referred to as 'they' (even though this is normally reserved for intelligent beings) because these verses attribute witnessing and speech to them, and both of these acts are marks of intelligent beings.

If 'speech' (*nuṭq*) is being used in this verse in its literal rather than its figurative sense, then there is no doubt that it refers to the expression of a thought contained in the mind by way of verbal communication. This requires that the speaker know something and that they disclose this knowledge to another. Al-Rāghib says that 'speech' is almost never attributed to a non-human entity except figuratively and with a degree of anthropomorphism. However, the apparent meaning of the verses suggests that the terminology they employ—such as *qawl*, *takallum*, *nuṭq* (all of which signify the act of speaking) or *shahāda* ('testifying' or 'bearing witness')—is meant in its literal sense.

Hence, the testimony of the limbs against the wrongdoers takes the form of genuine speech and represents a disclosure of knowledge acquired previously. We can know this on the basis of the 'skins' saying, *"We were given speech by Allah…"* in response to the wrongdoers asking: *"Why did you bear witness against us?"* In their response, they explain what caused them to speak and disclose the knowledge they bore within themselves; God compelled them to speak, but this does not diminish the worth of their testimony or make it any less incriminating for their owners. After all, they were only being made to tell the truth and reveal what they knew,

and this does not in any way impugn their credibility as witnesses.

…who gave speech to all things": This is their description of God, in which they indicate that the power of speech has not solely been granted to the limbs, such that they alone should be asked this question. On the contrary, the power of speech has been granted to all things, and the one who granted this power to them is God Himself.

…He created you the first time, and to Him you are being brought back: This is either the conclusion of the speech of the skins or it is God speaking directly. In any case, the speaker points out that God has knowledge of their deeds in any case, and the limbs are only saying what He already knows.

In other words: Your existence begins with Him and ends with Him, so when you make manifest what non-existence had concealed—and that is your first creation—He gives you existence and endows you with attributes and the power to act, and in doing so He makes all of these things yours. Then, you return to Him, and He takes this existence back from you, but He has always been its rightful owner. So, how can he not know what you do? The disclosure of these deeds to Him when you return to Him is merely Him making you speak and testify against yourselves to Him.

Based on the above explanation, it becomes clear why the verse says, *He created you the first time*: It refers to the beginning of your existence.

Commentators on the Qur'an have offered a similar range of interpretations for the phrase "We were given speech by God" to those given for the earlier phrase: *bear witness against them*. For example, some say that on the Day of Judgment, God will endow them with knowledge and the power of speech, and they will speak. Others say that He will create sounds resembling speech for the limbs and that this is what is meant by their speaking. Still others say that this speech is a figurative representation of their condition at that time.

The same also holds with regard to the phrase *who gave speech to all things.* Some say that it refers only to living things and does not include inanimate objects, even though not all living things can truly speak. They argue that this use of 'all things' (*kull shayʾ*) is commonly used in the Qur'an. For example, the wind sent against the people of ʿĀd is said to have destroyed *everything*, even though their dwellings were left standing (46:25).

Others argue that the speech God endows things with on the Day of Judgment—per the verse *We were given speech by Allah*—is actual speech, while the speech given to *all things* means the ability to signify a meaning.

Therefore, they say, there is no need to qualify either statement.

The problem that both of these interpretations face, however, is that in order to narrow the meaning of *all things* in the verse to only living things or read *speech* as figurative rather than literal, we must make certain assumptions. Namely, that nothing aside from those creatures that we know to be living and speaking—such as humans, animals, jinn, and angels—possess either knowledge or the power of speech.

However, just because this is how the world appears to us, this does not mean we can assume this to be the reality of things. After all, there is no way to empirically investigate the reality of inanimate objects, and the apparent meaning of the Qur'anic verses discussing the Day of Judgment suggests that all of these entities possess knowledge.

An Excursus on the Knowledge of Inanimate Objects according to the Qur'an

In our discussions above, we have seen that, on numerous occasions, the Qur'an's verses appear to assign the property of knowledge to all existent beings, living and otherwise. See, for example, our commentary on the verse, *There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification* (17:44), in which the phrase *but you do not understand their glorification* beautifully illustrates that their praise and worship of God is real and stems from their own knowledge and volition, rather than merely being a figurative expression of their ontological state.

This is similar in meaning to the verse, *Then He turned to the heaven, and it was smoke, and He said to it and to the earth, "Come! Willingly or unwillingly!" They said, "We come willingly"* (41:11), which we have discussed in this chapter.

It is also akin to the verse, *Who is more astray than him who invokes besides Allah such as would not respond to him until the Day of Resurrection, and who are oblivious of their invocation? When mankind are mustered, they will be their enemies, and they will disavow their worship* (46:6), in which the meaning of *would not respond* may refer to either the idols alone, or the idols and other things as well.

Or, for example, the verse in which the Earth speaks, *On that day she will relate her chronicles, for her Lord will have inspired her* (99:5).

Also in this category are the verses which describe a person's limbs testifying against them, speaking to God, and being questioned, especially the verse which we have just seen, above: *We were given speech by Allah, who gave speech to all things.*

Someone might argue: If awareness and volition were not only the properties of human beings and animals but the property of plants and minerals as well, then we would have seen visible signs of this in the same manner as we do in the case of people and animals. For example, we would see these objects acting on the basis of knowledge or responding to external stimuli.

In which case, we would respond: You cannot assume that all knowledge is identical in its nature, such that the effects that arise from it must be all alike to one another. It is entirely possible that there could be different levels or types of knowledge, each with their own unique effects. Not only that, but plants display surprisingly intelligent behavior, as do other natural phenomena in the cosmos, which is no less impressive in its precision and cleverness than that of living creatures.

An Excursus on the Knowledge of Inanimate Objects from an Islamic-Philosophical Perspective

In discussions of epistemology within the Islamic philosophical tradition (*falsafa*), it has been established, first of all, that knowledge (*ʿilm*) is the presence of one thing for another; second, it has been established that this knowledge is equivalent to immaterial existence (*wujūd mujarrad*). Third, because an immaterial entity is something which possesses actualized perfection (*kamāl*)—and not merely the potential for it—and every immaterial entity can be both present for any other immaterial entity and any other immaterial entity can be present for it. As an immaterial entity, this also applies to knowledge. Hence, anything that an immaterial entity can know in potential, it automatically knows in actuality.

Therefore, every knowing agent (*ʿālim*) is immaterial, and every object of knowledge (*maʿlūm*) is likewise immaterial. Conversely, matter (*mādda*) can neither have knowledge nor constitute knowledge. This is because knowledge is immaterial existence and, as such, material entities neither possess knowledge nor can be knowledge for anything else.

However, even though material entities are in a perpetual state of flux and change, they nevertheless subsist (*thubūt*) as entities in a way that neither admits change or alteration. From this angle, they can be said to have an immaterial aspect, and it is through this immaterial aspect that they have access to knowledge in the same manner as purely immaterial beings of the intelligible (*ʿaqliyya*) and imaginal (*mithāliyya*) planes.

Commentary continues:

وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَسْتَتِرُونَ أَنْ يَشْهَدَ عَلَيْكُمْ سَمْعُكُمْ وَلَا أَبْصَارُكُمْ وَلَا جُلُودُكُمْ وَلَٰكِنْ ظَنَنْتُمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَعْلَمُ كَثِيرًا مِمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

(41:22) ***You did not use to conceal yourselves lest your hearing should bear witness against you, or [for that matter] your sight, or your skin, but you thought that Allah did not know most of what you did.***

There is no doubt that God is the creator of all things and that there is no originator except Him. Therefore, there is nothing that can obstruct Him from His creation and nothing that can conceal His creation from Him; He is with all things wherever they are and in whatever state they are: *Surely Allah is to all things a witness* (22:17), and: *And Allah is a watcher over all things* (33:52).

Therefore, no matter where the human being goes, God is with Him. No matter what deeds He does, God is with His deeds as well. And, no matter what limb, or tool, or method, or means he uses to accomplish these deeds, God is with that limb, or tool, or method, or means as well: *And He is with you wherever you may be* (57:4), *He who stands over every soul with what it has earned* (13:33), *Indeed your Lord lies in ambush* (89:14).

From these verses, we can deduce that the human being—whatever work He happens to be engaged in—is passing through a multitude of ambushes in which his Lord lies in wait for Him and watches Him. So, when someone commits a sin and is occupied with their vice, they are heedless of God, utterly ignorant of their Lord's status, and dismissive of His power, while at the same time God lies in wait for them and observes them.

Based on the context, it is to this reality that the verse refers: *You did not use to conceal yourselves…*.

Therefore, the phrase *You did not use to conceal yourselves…* means that they did not used to hide themselves away while committing sins when they were still alive in this world; *…lest your hearing should bear witness against you…* explains what they would have hidden themselves away from.

…but you thought that Allah did not know most of what you did…: 'But' (*lākin*) is used in this part of the verse in the sense of 'no, rather' (*bal*). This shows that there is an implicit meaning, namely: You did not think that your limbs did not know your deeds, *but* you thought that God did not know… This is a humiliating rebuke, which on the Day of Judgment will

be delivered either to the idolaters in particular or to sinners in general.

The meaning of this verse can be summarized as follows: You did not hide the sins you committed while you were alive in this world from your own limbs, which you used in disobedience to God. This was not because you thought your limbs were unaware of what you did but because you thought God did not know most of what you did. In another words, you did not deem it trivial that your limbs bore witness to what you did, but you thought it trivial that We bore witness to it.

The usage of *but* in this verse is similar to what can be seen in the verses: *and you did not throw when you threw, but* (lākin) *it was Allah who threw* (8:17) and *And they did not wrong Us, but* (lākin) *they used to wrong themselves* (2:57). In both cases, *but* is used with the meaning of 'no, rather.'

Why does God say …*most of what you did*… rather than: 'You thought God did not know what you did'? Perhaps it is because those to whom this rebuke is addressed did believe in God and His attributes, including His knowledge; they believed that God had knowledge of everything in general, but when they were sinning they thought He did not know the particulars of what they did.

From this verse we can deduce that God's witnesses over humankind are an extension of His own witnessing, as per the verse: *nor do you perform any deed without Us having witnesses over you when you are engaged therein* (10:61).

Commentators have offered other interpretations of this verse, but these are generally unsupported by its context and tend to involve a degree of intellectual gymnastics. For this reason, we have not discussed them here.

وَذَٰلِكُمْ ظَنُّكُمُ الَّذِي ظَنَنتُم بِرَبِّكُمْ أَرْدَاكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُم مِّنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(41:23) *That is your misjudgment that you entertained about your Lord and which ruined you. So you became losers.*

'Ruined you' (*ardākum*) is used here in the same sense as *halāk* ('to perish').

That is your misjudgment… is a subject and predicate pair, while *which ruined you* is a second predicate for the same subject. This can also be read as *That misjudgment of yours*…, whereby *misjudgment* is a permutation (*badal*) of the demonstrative pronoun *that*.

According to the first reading, the verse means: 'That is the supposition (*ẓann*) you entertained, and supposition does not avail anything against the truth compared to direct knowledge or witnessing! This supposition has destroyed you, so you have become losers.'

According to the second reading, the verse means: 'The supposition that you entertained about your Lord—that He did not know most of what you did—has destroyed you, as it made your sinning seem trivial to you, which led you to ingratitude towards God, and, as a result, you became losers.'

فَإِنْ يَصْبِرُوا فَالنَّارُ مَثْوًى لَهُمْ ۖ وَإِنْ يَسْتَعْتِبُوا فَمَا هُمْ مِنَ الْمُعْتَبِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

(41:24) ***Should they be patient, the Fire is their abode; and should they seek to propitiate, they will not be redeemed.***

According to al-Rāghib in his *Mufradāt*, an 'abode' (*mathwā*) means 'a permanent place of residence.'

In *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, 'seek to propitiate' (*yastaᶜtibū*) means to try to please or mollify someone. It is derived from *iᶜtāb*, an Arabic term which originally meant to send leather to the tanner to be repaired but later acquired the figurative meaning of trying to make amends with someone in order to regain their friendship as it was before.

The meaning of the verse, then, is that: If they are patient, then hell is their shelter and permanent residence, and if they seek to make amends with Us and apologize in order to escape their punishment, We will not be mollified, nor will we accept their excuses. Therefore, the verse is of the same meaning as, *Enter it, and whether you are patient or impatient it will be the same for you* (52:16).

وَقَيَّضْنَا لَهُمْ قُرَنَاءَ فَزَيَّنُوا لَهُمْ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَحَقَّ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقَوْلُ فِي أُمَمٍ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ مِنَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنْسِ ۖ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا خَاسِرِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(41:25) ***We have assigned them companions who make to seem decorous to them whatever is before them and whatever is behind them, and the word became due against them, as it did against the nations that passed away before them of jinn and humans. They were indeed losers.***

The original meaning of *taqyīḍ* (to assign) is 'to exchange one thing for another,' while *Quranāʾ* (companions) is the plural of *qarīn*.

We have assigned them companions…: Considering that the original meaning of *assigned* is *exchanged*, this shows that if they had been faithful and Godwary, God would have supported them with companions who would have guided them and led them aright, as per the verse: *He has written faith into their hearts and strengthened them with a spirit from Him* (58:22). Instead, they disbelieved and were profligate, so God exchanged these companions for companions chosen from amongst the devils who would stay with them and accompany them. And God only did this to recompense them for their ingratitude and sinfulness.

Some have said that this means: We gave them evil companions from among the jinn and humankind instead of virtuous companions with whom they had been enjoined to associate, but they failed to do so.' However, the interpretation we have offered above seems better.

…who make to seem decorous to them whatever is before them and whatever is behind them…: Perhaps this refers to the material enjoyments they throw themselves into in the present and their hopes and ambitions for the future.

Some have said *whatever is before them* refers to the evil deeds they have sent ahead of themselves, so that they will perform more of them, while *whatever is behind them* refers to the evil traditions and customs they have instituted to be followed by those who come after them. It is possible to include this interpretation within the above one.

Others have said *whatever is before them* refers to whatever parts of this world they have access to, so that they give preference to it over the Hereafter, turn towards it, and strive for it. At the same time, they say *whatever is behind them* refers to the Hereafter, insofar as their companions tell them that there is no resurrection, no life after death, no Judgment, no heaven, and no hell. However, this reading stretches credibility, as we would not say that someone who disbelieves in the Hereafter sees it as decorous.

…and the word became due against them, as it did against the nations that passed away before them of jinn and humans…: In other words, they were sentenced to punishment, just as people like them from earlier nations of both jinn and humankind were sentenced to punishment before. And the 'word' (*qawl*) here refers to the 'word of punishment' (*kalimat al-ʿadhāb*), as per the verses: *But those who are faithless and deny Our signs, they shall be the inmates of the Fire and they shall remain in it* (2:39) and *I will surely fill hell with you and all of those who follow you* (38:85).

…They were indeed losers: This either explains why the word of punishment became due against them or offers an explanation for the entirety of the passage about the sinners.

This verse also shows that the certainty of death applies to the jinn just as much as it applies to humankind.

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Examining Narrations

(1) In his *Faqīh*, al-Ṣadūq narrates from the Commander of the Faithful [Imām ʿAlī], in his testament to Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya: 'God says: "*You did not use to conceal yourselves lest your hearing should bear witness against you, or your sight, or your skin*," and "skins" here means "private parts."'

(2) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is transmitted via a chain of narrators from Ibn Abī ʿAmr al-Zubayrī, from Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]: 'By "skins," the verse means the private parts and thighs.'

(3) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, [Imām] al-Ṣādiq says: 'The believer should fear God with the same fear that he would have if he were on the brink of Hellfire, and he should have hope in God as though he was already an inhabitant of paradise. God the Exalted says: "*That is your misjudgment that you entertained about your Lord*."' Then he said: 'Surely God follows His servants' opinion of Him; if it is good, then He is good, and if it is bad, then He is bad.'

(4) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is transmittered via a chain of narrators from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-Ḥajjāj, from Abū ʿAbd Allāh, in a tradition, that God's Messenger said: 'There is no servant that holds a good opinion of God Almighty save that God follows their opinion of Him. That is God's saying: "*That is your misJudgment that you entertained about your Lord*."'

(5) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, al-Ṭabarānī, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, Muslim, Abū Dāwud, Ibn Māja, and Ibn Mardawayh narrate from Jābir, who said: 'God's Messenger said: "Let none of you die lest he has a good opinion of God, for it was about a people whose ill opinion of God had ruined them that God said: "*That is your misjudgment that you entertained about your Lord and which ruined you. So you became losers.*"'

Author's comments: Accounts have been narrated concerning the occasions of revelation for some of the verses we have discussed, but these accounts do not match the context of the verses within the Qur'an. For this reason, we have opted not to include them here.

Verses 26 to 39

Now the conversation returns to the discussion of the idolaters' rejection of the Qur'an that was mentioned at this chapter's opening and their plot to attack its credibility. These verses discuss the disbelievers and some of what lies in store for them as a result of their having gone astray, along with those who have gone aright from the faithful and some of what awaits them in the hereafter, and also various issues pertaining to the afterlife.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَا تَسْمَعُوا لِهَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ وَالْغَوْا فِيهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَغْلِبُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

(41:26) ***The faithless say, "Do not listen to this Qur'an and hoot it down so that you may prevail."***

Lughuw (translated here as 'hooting') means a baseless claim or meaningless speech. Hence, to *hoot it down* means to make meaningless noises. The fact that the faithless say *this Qur'an* (using the demonstrative pronoun *this* or *hādhā* along with its name) shows that the Qur'an is their sole concern and their only wish is to prevent it having any effect.

This verse reveals their utter powerlessness to confront the Qur'an, to produce any discourse that can equal it or match it, or to offer any convincing arguments against it. They find themselves so incapable that they tell one another not to listen to it but instead to shout over it with meaningless noises when the Prophet recites its verses. In this way, they hoped to interrupt his recitation and prevent other people from hearing its message and, in doing so, blunt its effect on society.

فَلَنُذِيقَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَسْوَأَ الَّذِي كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(41:27) ***We will surely make the faithless taste a severe punishment, and We will surely requite them by the worst of what they used to do.***

This is a promise from God to punish the faithless. Based on the context of the verse, by *the faithless* is meant those who said *Do not listen to*

this Qur'an…, even if the verse is general in its wording.

…and We will surely requite them by the worst of what they used to do: Some say that *the worst of what they used to do* means the totality of their misdeeds. At the same time, other commentators have said this refers to only the very worst of their crimes and does not say anything about their other sins and that this is to emphasise the severity of the punishment and dissuade others from doing likewise.

ذَٰلِكَ جَزَاءُ أَعْدَاءِ اللَّهِ النَّارُ ۖ لَهُمْ فِيهَا دَارُ الْخُلْدِ ۖ جَزَاءً بِمَا كَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يَجْحَدُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

(41:28) ***That is the requital of the enemies of Allah the Fire! In it they will have an everlasting abode, as a requital for their impugning Our signs.***

It is a subject-predicate pair, and *the Fire* is a permutation (*badal*) or an expository conjunction (*ʿaṭf bayān*) for *That* or the predicate for an implicit subject with the meaning of 'It is…', or the subject of the following phrase: *In it they will have an everlasting abode.*

In it they will have an everlasting abode… means that the fire will encompass all of them and each of them will have their own home in which to dwell forever more.

…as a requital for their impugning Our signs: 'As a requital' is an absolute object (*mafʿūl muṭlaq*) that belongs to either an implicit verb (with the meaning: *They will be requited with this as a requital…*) or for the aforementioned infinitive, *That is the requital.* This is akin to the grammatical construction of the verse, *…indeed the hell shall be your requital, an ample reward* (17:63).

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا رَبَّنَا أَرِنَا اللَّذَيْنِ أَضَلَّانَا مِنَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنْسِ نَجْعَلْهُمَا تَحْتَ أَقْدَامِنَا لِيَكُونَا مِنَ الْأَسْفَلِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(41:29) ***The faithless will say, Our Lord! Show us those who led us astray from among jinn and humans so that we may trample them under our feet, so that they may be among the lowermost!***

This is what they will say when they are in Hellfire; they will ask God to show them those jinn and humans who they had followed during their worldly lives, so that they may trample on them in order to humiliate and

abase them and increase their punishment: "…*so that we may trample them under our feet, so that they may be among the lowermost!*"

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنْتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

(41:30) *Indeed those who say, "Our Lord is Allah!" and then go aright, the angels descend upon them. "Do not fear, nor be grieved! Receive the good news of the paradise which you have been promised."*

Al-Rāghib says that *istiqāma* (translated as: 'gone aright') refers to a path which follows a straight line. The way of truth is compared to a path like this in the verse: 'Guide us to the straight path' (*al-sirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, 1:6). Therefore, *istiqāma* in a human being means for that person to adhere to the straight path, as per the verse: *Indeed those who say, "Our Lord is Allah!" and then go aright*.

In *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, al-Rāzī writes: *Istiqāma* means to be upright.

Therefore, the meaning of *and then go aright* is that they remain in the middle of the path without inclining or deviating one way or the other and that they remain steadfast to their professed beliefs. God says: *so long as they are steadfast with you, be steadfast with them* (9:7). Elsewhere, he says: *and be steadfast, just as you have been commanded, and do not follow their desires* (42:15). Whatever else has been said about this in the various works of commentary ultimately devolves to the meanings we have discussed here.

This verse and those that follow it expound the pleasant state of the faithful in the hereafter, just as the ones before it portray the dire state of the disbelievers.

…the angels descend upon them. "Do not fear, nor be grieved! Receive the good news of the paradise which you have been promised": This foretells how the faithful will be received by the angels and how the latter will boost their morale and comfort them by giving them glad tidings of God's generosity.

Hence, the angels allay their fears and remove their grief, as fear arises from the expectation of some future harm, such as divine punishment, or loss, such as being denied paradise. At the same time, grief only arises from some harm or loss that has already occurred, such as the misdeeds that they regret doing or the good deeds they regret not doing. For this

reason, the angels come to reassure them that they are safe and have nothing to fear or grieve; their sins are forgiven and they will be spared punishment.

Then the angels give the faithful glad tidings that paradise has been promised to them, by saying, *Receive the good news of the paradise which you have been promised*. The phrase *which you have been promised* shows that the angels are only bringing them these glad tidings after they have left their worldly life behind (in which they first received this promise).

نَحْنُ أَوْلِيَاؤُكُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ ۖ وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا مَا تَشْتَهِي
أَنْفُسُكُمْ وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا مَا تَدَّعُونَ ﴿٣١﴾ نُزُلًا مِنْ غَفُورٍ رَحِيمٍ ﴿٣٢﴾

(41:31-32) ***We are your friends in the life of this world and in the Hereafter, and you will have in it whatever your souls desire, and you will have in it whatever you ask for, as a hospitality from One all-forgiving, all-merciful.***

This is a continuation of the angels' glad tidings to the faithful. They mention their friendship with the faithful in the life of this world even though they have already left it behind in preparation for mentioning their friendship in the hereafter. This is to show that their friendship in the hereafter is a result of their friendship in this world. It is as if to say: 'We are your friends in the hereafter just as…'—or 'because…we were your friends in your worldly life. So, we will look after you now just as we have looked after you in the past!'

The angels being the friends of the faithful does not contradict the fact that God is their friend (*walī*), as the angels are the intermediaries of His mercy and kindness, and they do not possess any existence independent of His. Perhaps this verse mentions the angels' friendship with the faithful rather than God's friendship with them in order to draw a contrast between God's friends and His enemies. After all, God said regarding His enemies: *We have assigned them companions…*, so perhaps this is why the angels introduce themselves by saying: *We are your friends*.

By contrasting these two statements with one another, we can see that the role of the angels' friendship is to guide and support the faithful, for the guiding angels (*al-malāʾika al-musaddidīn*) only aid those people who have God's friendship. By contrast, the guardian angels (*malāʾika al-ḥaras*), the angels that dispense provisions and destined times of death (*muwakkalū al-arzāq wa al-ājāl*), and other similar classes of angel are

appointed to both the faithful and the faithless alike.

Some have suggested that this verse is not, in fact, the speech of the angels but the speech of God Himself.

…and you will have in it whatever your souls desire, and you will have in it whatever you ask for: 'In it' in both cases refers to the Hereafter.

The word *shahwa* (translated as 'desire') originally means for the soul to be drawn towards something by one of its faculties in order to obtain enjoyment from it, such as the desire for food, drink, and sexual intercourse.

The word *iddiʿāʾ* (translated as 'ask')—derived from the same Arabic root as *duʿāʾ*, or 'supplication'—means to request something. Hence the second of the two clauses here—*and you will have in it whatever you ask for*—is actually broader than the first one— *and you will have in it whatever your souls desire*—in scope, as one can ask for more than merely what one's soul desires.

This verse (41:31) gives glad tidings to the faithful that in the hereafter they shall have everything they could possibly desire, whether food, drink, sexual intercourse, or something else. In fact, they shall have more and greater things than these, they need only wish for something and it is theirs: *There they will have whatever they wish* (50:35).

وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ قَوْلًا مِمَّنْ دَعَا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا وَقَالَ إِنَّنِي مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

(41:33) *Who has better speech than him who summons to Allah and acts righteously and says, "Indeed I am one of those who submit"?*

This verse contrasts with the earlier one, *The faithless say, "Do not listen to this Qur'an and hoot it down…"* (41:26), for they would argue with the Prophet just as they would dispute the Qur'an, and the beginning of this chapter of the Qur'an quotes them as saying: *Our hearts are in veils [which shut them off] from what you invite us to…* (41:5). In this verse, God reassures His Prophet by telling him that his call and his message are the best call and the best message.

Who has better speech than him who summons to Allah…: This is a reference to the Prophet, even if the wording of the verse includes anyone who summons to God. However, someone might also call others to God for corrupt reasons, in which case it would not be *better speech*. This

is why the verse qualifies this statement with the phrase …*and acts righteously*…, as good deeds reflect noble intentions. However, good deeds do not necessarily indicate that a person's beliefs are true or that they adhere to them, and there is no good in a message if its messenger does not believe in it, hence the verse inserts a second qualifier after the first, namely …*and says, "Indeed I am one of those who submit."* And, based on the context in which it appears, the meaning of the word 'speech' (*qawl*) here is an opinion or a belief.

So, if someone submits to God and acts righteously, then calls others to God, his speech is *better speech*. However, the archetype of calling others to God and the role-model for all those who undertake it is the Prophet, and the Qur'an addresses him to expound the best way of inviting others towards God and the most effective means to obtain the desired result from this, which is, of course, to have an effect on people's souls. So, it says: *Good and evil are not equal.*

وَلَا تَسْتَوِى الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ۚ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِى هِىَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِى
بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِىٌّ حَمِيمٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

(41:34) ***Good and evil are not equal. Respond with what is best. Behold, he between whom and you was enmity, will be as though he were a sympathetic friend.***

In other words, good and evil characteristics are not equal with respect to having a positive effect on people's souls.

Respond with what is best: Here, it is as though the Qur'an is responding to a question from someone who has just heard the words *good and evil are not equal* and asked: So what should I do?' It gives the answer: *Respond with what is best…* meaning that you should respond to an evil characteristic with the best characteristic that is its contrary and its opposite. So, respond to falsehood with truth rather than with another falsehood, with good sense to their immoderation and ignorance, and with forbearance to their misdeeds, and so on.

Behold, he between whom and you was enmity, will be as though he were a sympathetic friend: Here, the Qur'an foretells the effect and the outcome that responding with what is best will have. In short, if you respond with what is best, you will be surprised to see that your enemy becomes like a sympathetic friend.

The phrase …*he between whom and you was enmity*… is more eloquent

than merely saying 'enemy,' even though it would have been more succinct to use the latter.

وَمَا يُلَقَّاهَا إِلَّا الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا وَمَا يُلَقَّاهَا إِلَّا ذُو حَظٍّ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٣٥﴾

(41:35) ***But none is granted it except those who are patient, and none is granted it except the greatly endowed.***

Then God magnifies the importance of responding with what is best and praises it in the most eloquent and laudatory terms: *But none is granted it except those who are patient, and none is granted it except the greatly endowed*—greatly endowed, that is, with human perfection and good character.

Moreover, the verse emphasizes that this great endowment belongs exclusively to those who practice patience (*ṣabr*).

وَإِمَّا يَنْزَغَنَّكَ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ نَزْغٌ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ ۖ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٣٦﴾

(41:36) ***Should a temptation from Satan disturb you, seek the protection of Allah. Indeed He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing.***

Nazgh (translated as 'temptation') literally means a goad or a prod that is used to strike an animal's back or rear in order to drive it forward.

The agent of temptation here is either Satan or his pleadings and suggestions, though the former is more apposite, given the status of the Prophet, as Satan cannot tempt him through suggestions (*waswās*). However, this could be read as the suggestions Satan imparts to his followers amongst the disbelievers and rejectors in order to goad them into greater obstinacy and to persecute and harass the Prophet. For such people, responding with what is best is ineffective, because Satan is constantly inspiring them and urging them on in their enmity and hostility. This is also mentioned in the verses: *…after that Satan had incited ill feeling between me and my brothers…* (12:100) and *We did not send before you any messenger or prophet but that, when he recited, Satan interjected in his recitation* (22:52).

However, if the latter meaning is meant, then it makes sense to read this as a form of indirect speech (addressed to the Prophet but intending his audience) to convey general command to the faithful.

…seek the protection of Allah. Indeed He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing: *ʿAudh*, *ʿiyādh*, *maʿādh*, and *istiʿādha* (translated as 'seeking protection') all mean to take refuge with God. Hence, the meaning of this

passage is: Take refuge with God from Satan's goading, for He is all-hearing of your pleas and all-knowing of your state, or He is all-hearing of your speech and all-knowing of your deeds.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ اللَّيْلُ وَالنَّهَارُ وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ ۚ لَا تَسْجُدُوا لِلشَّمْسِ وَلَا لِلْقَمَرِ وَاسْجُدُوا لِلَّهِ الَّذِي خَلَقَهُنَّ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(41:37) ***Among His signs are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon. Do not prostrate to the sun, nor to the moon, but prostrate to Allah who created them, if it is Him that you worship.***

Having said that the summons of the Prophet is the best speech and having enjoined him to respond to his adversaries with the best character, the Qur'an now turns to the summons itself and argues for the doctrines of God's oneness and the Resurrection over the course of the following three verses.

So, when the Qur'an says *Among His signs are the night and the day…*, it is arguing that the unity of the cosmic order points to the oneness of its Lord, who creates and directs it. Furthermore, it is arguing that the oneness of its Lord points to the necessity of worshipping that Lord alone. Hence, it follows this by saying: *Do not prostrate to the sun, nor to the moon….*

Hence, the Qur'an once again appears to be responding an interjection by its audience who, after hearing *Among His signs are the night and the day…*, asked: 'So what should we do?' So, it answers: *Do not prostrate to the sun, nor to the moon*, because they are two of God's creations that are under His direction. Instead, you should prostrate to God alone and worship only Him. This is relevant because all of the idol worshippers would revere the sun and the moon, even if they did not worship them directly, with the exception—it is said—of the Sabaeans. The pronoun 'them' (*hunna*) in *Allah who created them* refers to the night, the day, the sun, and the moon together.

The phrase *…if it is Him that you worship* shows that worshipping Him cannot be combined with the worship of anything other than Him.

فَإِنِ اسْتَكْبَرُوا فَالَّذِينَ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ يُسَبِّحُونَ لَهُ بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْأَمُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

(41:38) ***But if they disdain, those who are near your Lord glorify for Him night and day, and they are not wearied.***

Those who are near your Lord refers to the angels whose existence is dedicated solely to the worship of God, as we have discussed in our commentary on the verse, *Indeed those who are near your Lord do not disdain to worship Him. They glorify for Him and prostrate to Him* (7:206).

Note that the Qur'an says *glorify for Him* rather than 'glorify Him.' This is to show that they glorify Him alone and none other; *night and day* shows that this glorification is constant and unceasing, as there is no night nor day for the angels.

Hence, the meaning of this verse is: Even if those disbelievers refuse to prostrate to God alone, there are others in existence who worship Him, including those who are permanently glorifying Him without tiring, and they are the ones who are with your Lord.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنَّكَ تَرَى الْأَرْضَ خَاشِعَةً فَإِذَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْهَا الْمَاءَ اهْتَزَّتْ
وَرَبَتْ ۚ إِنَّ الَّذِي أَحْيَاهَا لَمُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ ۚ إِنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٣٩﴾

(41:39) ***Among His signs is that you see the earth desolate; but when We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells. Indeed He who revives it is the reviver of the dead. Indeed He has power over all things.***

Khushūʿ (translated here as desolate') literally means to be humbled; *ihtizāz* (it stirs') means to move with intensity; and *rubūw* (swells') means to grow and rise up. The description of the earth stirring and swelling in this verse refers to its flourishing with plants that rise out of it.

This verse presents an allegory, in which the earth's transformation from a barren and empty place to one teeming and verdant with plant life is compared to the state of a person. Initially, this person is lowly, abject, and clad in tattered rags, but then he obtains some wealth that allows him to meet all of his needs in life, so he puts on beautiful clothes, becomes joyful and proud, and his face radiates comfort and ease.

The verse also presents its audience an argument for the Resurrection, the content of which we have already discussed in previous chapters.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, concerning the verse: *Our Lord! Show us those who led us astray…* (41:29), we read that this refers to Iblīs and his cohorts and the first tribes of Adam's descendants who invented sinning. This is narrated from ʿAlī.

Author's comments: This may be a case of applying the verse's meaning to a specific instance, for it is general in its wording.

(2) In the same source, regarding the verse: *Indeed those who say, Our Lord is Allah! and then go aright* (41:30), it is narrated from Anas: 'God's Messenger recited this verse to us, then he said: "People have said this, and many of them subsequently disbelieved. So, whoever says it and adheres to it until they die, they are the ones who have gone aright."'

(3) In the same source, concerning the verse: *the angels descend upon them*' (41:30), we read that this refers to their time of death. This is the opinion of Mujāhid and al-Sudayy, and it is narrated from Abū ʿAbd Allāh.

(4) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the verse *We are your friends in the life of this world*' (41:31), we read: 'This means: "We protected you from the devils." *And in the Hereafter* means at their time of death.'

(5) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, concerning the verse: *We are your friends in the life of this world*, we read: 'It means: "We protect you in this world, at your time of death, and in the Hereafter."'

(6) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, regarding the verse: *Respond with what is best* (41:34), it says: 'Respond to the evil of the one who mistreats you with your goodness, so that the one "*between whom and you was enmity, will be as though he were a sympathetic friend.*"'

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Verses 40 to 54

The discussion once again returns to the topic of the Qur'an and the disbelievers' denial of it, in spite of the clarity of its verses and the loftiness of its language. In addition to it, the present verses also highlight their disregard for the Qur'an, their persecution of the Prophet, their obstinate denial of the truth, their rejection of God's signs, and the consequences of this. This also represents the concluding section of the present chapter.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُلْحِدُونَ فِي آيَاتِنَا لَا يَخْفَوْنَ عَلَيْنَا ۗ أَفَمَنْ يُلْقَىٰ فِي النَّارِ خَيْرٌ
أَمْ مَنْ يَأْتِي آمِنًا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ۚ اعْمَلُوا مَا شِئْتُمْ ۖ إِنَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

(41:40) ***Indeed those who commit sacrilege in Our signs are not hidden from Us. Is someone who is cast in the Fire better off, or someone who arrives safely on the Day of Resurrection? Act as you wish; indeed He sees best what you do.***

This verse is like an isthmus that sits between the previous section and the subsequent one, particularly the verses between *The faithless say, "Do not listen to this Qur'an…"* (41:26) and *Among His signs are the night and the day* (41:37), and from verse *Indeed those who defy the Reminder when it comes to them…* (41:40) onwards.

Indeed those who commit sacrilege in Our signs are not hidden from Us…: This passage threatens the blasphemers of this nation, as confirmed by the following verse, and *ilḥād* ('sacrilege') literally means 'to swerve.'

The phrase *those who commit sacrilege in Our signs* covers every form of sacrilege done to every manner of divine sign. So, it includes sacrilege done to the divine signs seen in the natural world, such as the sun, the moon, and other celestial bodies. People considered these signs from God, but then turned to worship them in place of God and, in doing so, violated their sanctity. This verse also covers sacrilege done to revelatory signs, for example considering the Qur'an to be a forgery that has been falsely attributed to God or the imagining of the Prophet, hooting over it (as described above) in order to disrupt its recitation and prevent others from hearing its message, or explaining its verses according to one's own whims or interpreting them in a way to seek discord—all of this is a form of sacrilege done to God's signs, as all of these acts involve placing God's

signs in other than their rightful place and taking them in a direction that is other than that which God intended.

With the words *Is someone who is cast in the Fire better off, or someone who arrives safely on the Day of Resurrection?*, God announces the recompense of those who commit sacrilege in His signs is to be thrown into the Fire on the Day of Resurrection. He also shows that they cannot expect anyone to protect them by interceding for them with God or coming to their aid, and that no excuse will be accepted from them. All that awaits them is hell. The apparent meaning of the phrase *…or someone who arrives safely on the Day of Resurrection?* indicates that there are only two classes of people, without any alternative: There are those who go aright in faith and those who profane God's signs, and it is the people who go aright who are safe on the Day of Resurrection.

Act as you wish; indeed He sees best what you do: This serves to intensify the threat.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِالذِّكْرِ لَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ ۖ وَإِنَّهُ لَكِتَابٌ عَزِيزٌ ﴿٤١﴾ لَا يَأْتِيهِ
الْبَاطِلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَلَا مِنْ خَلْفِهِ ۖ تَنْزِيلٌ مِنْ حَكِيمٍ حَمِيدٍ ﴿٤٢﴾

(41:41–42) ***Indeed those who defy the Reminder when it comes to them, and indeed it is an august Book: falsehood cannot approach it, from before it nor from behind it, a revelation sent down from One all-wise, all-laudable.***

'The Reminder' (*al-Dhikr*) is the Qur'an, because it contains the remembrance of God. The sentence is qualified by the phrase *when it comes to them* to show that what is meant by *those who defy* here are the Arab idolaters—both the Quraysh and others—who are contemporary with the Qur'an.

Scholars have differed concerning the predicate of the phrase *those who defy the Reminder…* but from the context of the verse it appears that it is the same as that *those who commit sacrilege in Our signs*, as rejecting the Qur'an is one form of profaning God's signs. Therefore, the meaning of this verse is that those who defy the Reminder when it comes to them will be in the Fire on the Day of Resurrection. Alternatively, it is possible that the predicate was omitted altogether in order to leave it to the audience's imagination what would become of such persons. In which case, such an omission is to be understood as a threat of punishment.

It is to this discussion that al-Zamakhsharī was referring when he

said in his *al-Kashshāf* that the phrase *those who defy the Reminder…* is a permutation (*badal*) of *those who commit sacrilege in Our signs*.

Some have argued that the predicate of *those who defy the Reminder…* is the forthcoming phrase *They are called from a distant place* (41:44).

Others have said that its predicate is: *falsehood cannot approach it, from before it nor from behind it*, meaning falsehood cannot approach it from them. In other words, they cannot provide anything that would falsify it or their falsehoods cannot even come close to it.

Others still have said: *Indeed it is an august Book* acts as a predicate in this instance, with the meaning that those who defy it have disbelieved in it even though it is an august Book.

Some identify *Nothing is said to you* as the predicate, with the meaning: Nothing is said to you concerning those who defy the Reminder except what has already been said to the messengers before you; that the disbelievers will be annihilated in this world and that the punishment of hell awaits them in the Hereafter.'

However, a perceptive reader will be able to see that all of the above theories require a rather cumbersome reading of the text.

Indeed it is an august Book refers to *the Reminder*, which is the Qur'an. 'August' (*ʿazīz*) means either that it is without compeer or that there is nothing which can hope to overcome it. The second of these meanings seems most apposite given that it is immediately followed by the passage: *falsehood cannot approach it, from before it nor from behind it*.

Falsehood cannot approach it, from before it nor from behind it: By falsehood "approaching" it, the Qur'an means for falsehood to become interpolated with it in whole or in part, which would mean that not all the knowledge it contains was true and that the laws, ordinances, and ethical teachings would—in whole or in part—not be authentic and, therefore, not right to act upon.

Therefore, when God says *from before it nor from behind it,* this means in the present time and in the future; both when it was revealed and afterwards, until the Day of Resurrection.

Some have said that this means 'from every direction,' in the same way that 'day and night' might be used to signify 'all the time.' Therefore, the Qur'an is protected from falsehood or invalidation from all angles. The generality of this statement derives from the fact that the phrase *falsehood cannot approach it* is phrased in absolute terms and not qualified by any other clause.

In both cases, however, the meaning is that it contains clear and

irrefutable signs; there is no deceit in its predictions, nor any falsehood in its teachings, laws, and morals. There is nothing that can compare to it, so it cannot be altered, whether through interpolating new passages or through distorting its verses in some way.

Therefore, this verse follows a similar vein to another verse: *Indeed We have sent down the Reminder, and indeed We will preserve it* (15:9).

The phrase, …*a revelation sent down from One all-wise, all-laudable*, serves as an explanation for why it is an *august Book*' that *falsehood cannot approach*. In other words, how could it be otherwise when it is something sent down from the All-wise, whose deeds are perfect and flawless and who is infinitely praiseworthy?

مَا يُقَالُ لَكَ إِلَّا مَا قَدْ قِيلَ لِلرُّسُلِ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَذُو مَغْفِرَةٍ وَذُو عِقَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٤٣﴾

(41:43) ***Nothing is said to you except what has already been said to the messengers before you. Indeed your Lord is forgiving and One who metes out a painful retribution.***

Those saying this to him are those who disbelieve, and what they are saying is that he is a magician, a madman, or a poet either uttering nonsense, or seeking to gain authority over us. Meanwhile, those who said this to the messengers before him were their people to whom they had been sent, just as those saying this to him are the people to whom he was sent.

Hence, the meaning of this verse is as follows: What the disbelievers of your people say to you when you were sent to them in order to call them to God and the accusations they hurled at you are no different to what was said to the messengers who came before you by their own peoples.

Indeed your Lord is forgiving and One who metes out a painful retribution: This again is a threat to those accusing the Prophet in this manner, namely that your Lord has these two attributes, so let them consider what will befall them as a consequence of what they say to His messenger—will it be forgiveness or punishment? This passage has a similar tone to the earlier verse: *Act as you wish; indeed He sees best what you do* (41:40). In other words, whatever good or evil you do, He will recompense you for it like-for-like.

Some have said that this means: What has been revealed to you by God concerning those who defy the Reminder is naught but what has been revealed to the messengers who came before you, namely that your

Lord is forgiving but also possessed of painful retribution. Therefore, the meaning of *say* here is *revealed*, and *Indeed your Lord…* is the explanation of what has been said to the Prophet and to his predecessors.

وَلَوْ جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا أَعْجَمِيًّا لَقَالُوا لَوْلَا فُصِّلَتْ آيَاتُهُ ۖ أَأَعْجَمِيٌّ وَعَرَبِيٌّ ۗ قُلْ هُوَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا هُدًى وَشِفَاءٌ ۖ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ فِي آذَانِهِمْ وَقْرٌ وَهُوَ عَلَيْهِمْ عَمًى ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ يُنَادَوْنَ مِنْ مَكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٤٤﴾

(41:44) ***Had We made it a non-Arabic Qur'an, they would have surely said, "Why have not its signs been articulated? What! A non-Arabian [scripture] and an Arabian [prophet]!?" Say, "For those who have faith, it is a guidance and healing; but as for those who are faithless, there is a deafness in their ears and it is lost to their sight. They are called from a distant place."***

According to al-Rāghib, the word *ʿajama* signifies the opposite of "clear," while the *ʿajam* are non-Arabs, *ʿajamī* is anything from a non-Arab, while one who is *aʿjam* in his speech is someone who speaks unclearly, whether or not they are an Arab, insofar as the Arabs struggle to understand those who do not speak Arabic. Hence, *aʿjamī* signifies someone who cannot speak eloquently in Arabic, whether or not they are a native Arab speaker, because of some speech impediment. Therefore, to refer to speech itself as *aʿjamī* or *ʿarabī* (that is, non-Arab or Arab) is figurative.

Hence, the meaning of this passage is as follows: If We made the Qur'an *aʿjamī*, such that its aims were unclear and the arrangement of its words was not eloquent, those of your people who disbelieve would say: Why are its verses not detailed and clear, and why can we not distinguish one part of it from another in plain and eloquent Arabic? Is this a foreign book of revelation sent to an Arab prophet?' In other words, these two things are irreconcilably contradictory.

Now, the term *ʿarabī*, which is singular, is used here, rather than *ʿarabiyyūn* or *ʿarabiyya*, which would have signified a multitude, even though this revelation was ultimately intended for a people rather than a lone individual. This is to emphasise the contrast here is being drawn between the hypothetical language of the revelation (*ʿajamī*) and the Arab-ness of its audience, rather than illustrating whether its intended audience was one person or many people.

In his *Kashshāf*, al-Zamakhsharī writes:

If one were to ask: "How can this refer to the Arab-ness of the

one sent to them as a messenger, while they are an Arab nation?" I would answer: "It is because it is supposed to reflect what a denier would have denied were they to see a foreign book being sent to an Arab people, namely: The message is foreign, but its audience is Arabic!' This is because the denial revolves around the contrast between the state of the message and its audience rather than around the audience being one or many. Therefore, the context requires that the language be detached from this concern in order to more clearly convey its meaning. This is no different to when you see a long dress on a short woman and you say: 'A long garment [m.] for so short a wearer [m.]!' (*al-libās ṭawīl wa al-lābis qaṣīr*, note that the gender of the 'wearer' is masculine, even while its referent in reality is feminine, in order to agree with the gender of the garment, or *libās*). On the other hand, if you had said: 'A long garment [m.] for so short a wearer [f.]!' (*al-libās ṭawīl wa al-lābis qaṣīra*), then your quip would have been less eloquent as the listener's mind would have been drawn to the contrast between the gender of the clothes and the one who was wearing them, when the purpose of the quip was to highlight something beyond that.'"

Say, "For those who have faith, it is a guidance and healing, but as for those who are faithless, there is a deafness in their ears, and it is lost to their sight." This passage explains that the effect of the Qur'an on its audience and its special quality does not stem from its language. On the contrary, it is because its audience is split into two kinds of people: Those who believe and those who do not believe. It is a source of guidance and healing for those who believe, as it will guide them to the truth and heal their hearts from the illnesses of doubt and uncertainty. On the other hand, it is a source of blindness for those who do not believe—those in whose ears is a deafness—it blinds them and they neither see the truth nor find the path of right guidance.

Those who do not believe are described as having a deafness in their ears; this is a reference to their own confession to this effect earlier in this chapter: *and there is a deafness in our ears*' (41:5).

They are called from a distant place—meaning that they do not hear the voice, nor see the person calling them. This is a parable drawn for their state, in that they do not pay attention to admonitions, nor do they consider arguments.

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ فَاخْتُلِفَ فِيهِ ۗ وَلَوْلَا كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ مِنْ رَبِّكَ لَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِنْهُ مُرِيبٍ ﴿٤٥﴾

(41:45) ***Certainly We gave Moses the Book, but differences arose about it; and were it not for a prior decree of your Lord, Judgment would have been made between them, for they are indeed in grave doubt concerning it.***

This is meant as a consolation and a comfort to the Prophet for the obstinacy of his people and their rejection of His divine message.

…and were it not for a prior decree of your Lord, Judgment would have been made between them…: That prior decree is God's saying: *On the earth shall be your abode and sustenance for a time* (7:24).

…for they are indeed in grave doubt concerning it—meaning they are in grave doubts about the scripture of Moses God tells the Prophet about the state of Moses' people in order to console him about what he sees amongst his own people.

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلِنَفْسِهِ ۖ وَمَنْ أَسَاءَ فَعَلَيْهَا ۗ وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِظَلَّامٍ لِلْعَبِيدِ ﴿٤٦﴾

(41:46) ***Whoever acts righteously, it is for his own soul, and whoever does evil, it is to its detriment, and your Lord is not tyrannical to the servants.***

In other words, each person's deeds are their own and people's actions ultimately return to their own selves, so if someone behaves righteously and to the benefit of others, the one who benefits from this is them. Conversely, if someone behaves evilly and harms others, then they harm themselves. Therefore, God does not do any injustice in delivering people the benefit of their righteous conduct in the form of divine reward or in delivering people the harm of their evil deeds in the form of punishment, as this is merely putting each thing in its proper place.

Were this unfair, then it would have surely been a grave injustice for God to reward and punish His innumerable servants for their innumerable deeds. However, this is neither unfair, nor is God a tyrant to His servants. However, this explains why God uses the hyperbolic expression 'tyrannical' (*ẓullām*) in the phrase, *…and your Lord is not tyrannical to the servants*, rather than merely saying, '…and your Lord is not unjust (*ẓālim*).'

إِلَيْهِ يُرَدُّ عِلْمُ السَّاعَةِ ۚ وَمَا تَخْرُجُ مِنْ ثَمَرَاتٍ مِنْ أَكْمَامِهَا وَمَا تَحْمِلُ

مِنْ أُنْثَىٰ وَلَا تَضَعُ إِلَّا بِعِلْمِهِ ۚ وَيَوْمَ يُنَادِيهِمْ أَيْنَ شُرَكَائِي قَالُوا آذَنَّاكَ مَا
مِنَّا مِنْ شَهِيدٍ ﴿٤٧﴾ وَضَلَّ عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَدْعُونَ مِنْ قَبْلُ ۖ وَظَنُّوا مَا لَهُمْ
مِنْ مَحِيصٍ ﴿٤٨﴾

(41:47-48) ***On Him devolves the knowledge of the Hour, and no fruit emerges from its covering and no female conceives or delivers except with His knowledge. On the day when He will call out to them, "Where are My partners?" They will say, "We have apprised You that there is no witness amongst us." What they used to invoke before has forsaken them, and they know there is no escape for them.***

To say that the knowledge of the Hour devolves to Him means that this knowledge is solely His and not known to anyone else. This is something repeated on numerous occasions in the Qur'an.

…and no fruit emerges from its covering and no female conceives or delivers except with His knowledge…: Meaning, that no fruit appears on trees, nor does any female become pregnant nor give birth except that this is accompanied by His knowledge of this. In other words, He knows the particulars of each and every thing in existence.

So, God is at once the creator of all things, the one who transforms all things, the one who has knowledge of all things right down to the tiniest detail, and the one who watches over them. His is the best governance of the cosmos and, hence, He alone is the Lord. This verse calls attention to His oneness in both lordship and divinity. And that is why He follows this passage with: *On the day when He will call out to them, "Where are My partners…?"*

On the day when He will call out to them, "Where are My partners?" They will say, "We have apprised You…: The adverbial phrase *On the day…* qualifies the verb *They will say.*

Some have said that the qualifying verb (*They will say*) has been deliberately omitted to show that the momentousness of this day cannot be expressed in words, akin to the verse: *The day, Allah will gather the apostles…* (5:109).

Others have said that it is the object of an implicit verb such as 'mention' (*udhkur*).

The first reading is possibly the most relevant, because of the meaning we have assigned to the beginning of the verse; the context of the verse

is the negation of any partners to God by demonstrating His governance of the cosmos and foretelling that the idolaters will acknowledge this on the Day of Judgment.

'Apprise' (*īdhān*) means to inform someone of something, and the meaning of 'witness' here is either in the sense of someone who delivers testimony or someone who sees something directly; *What they used to invoke before has forsaken them* is an exposition of why there are no witnesses for them.

…and they know there is no escape for them: Here, the word *ẓann* ('know'), according to some, is used to signify certainty, while *maḥīṣ* ('escape') means a place they can run away to.

Hence, the meaning of the verses is as follows: On the day God calls to the idolaters, 'Where are the partners that you claimed I had?' They will say, 'We have informed you that there is none among us who will attest to you having partners'—*or* 'There is none amongst us who see your partners'—and those whom they invoked besides God in this world will have deserted them, and they will be sure that there is no escape for them from God's punishment.'

لَا يَسْأَمُ الْإِنْسَانُ مِنْ دُعَاءِ الْخَيْرِ وَإِنْ مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ فَيَئُوسٌ قَنُوطٌ ﴿٤٩﴾

(41:49) ***Man is never wearied of supplicating for good, and should any ill befall him, he becomes hopeless, despondent.***

The conclusion of this chapter of the Qur'an begins by discussing the reason for the disbelievers' obstinate rejection of that which is plainly true; namely that they have deluded themselves such that when they are afflicted by some evil that they cannot repel, they give up hope for any good befalling them or for their prayers to their Lord receiving any response. At the same time, if any good befalls them, they become absorbed by it and fall prey to conceitedness, while forgetting what is real and true.

In short, the verse says that the human being is always seeking good—which they understand as whatever is beneficial for them in their worldly lives—but if they are afflicted by evil, then they become despondent and hopeless, for they see all the means that they depended upon to obtain good in this world have vanished. However, this does not necessarily preclude them having hope in God at the same time, as we shall see below.

وَلَئِنْ أَذَقْنَاهُ رَحْمَةً مِنَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ ضَرَّاءَ مَسَّتْهُ لَيَقُولَنَّ هَٰذَا لِي وَمَا أَظُنُّ

السَّاعَةَ قَائِمَةً وَلَئِنْ رُجِعْتُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي إِنَّ لِي عِنْدَهُ لَلْحُسْنَىٰ ۚ فَلَنُنَبِّئَنَّ
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِمَا عَمِلُوا وَلَنُذِيقَنَّهُمْ مِنْ عَذَابٍ غَلِيظٍ ﴿٥٠﴾

(41:50) ***And if We let him have a taste of Our mercy after distress has befallen him, he will surely say, "This is my due! I do not think the Hour will ever set in, and in case I am returned to my Lord, I will indeed have the best [reward] with Him." But We will surely inform the faithless about what they have done, and will surely make them taste a harsh punishment.***

Based on the wording of the previous verse, God could have said: 'And if he tastes good…', however God said: *if We let him have a taste of Our mercy* instead to show that the goodness which this person receives is a mercy that God Himself has allowed them to taste and that it is neither a tribulation by necessity, nor something that belongs rightfully to the human being (as were it something that belonged to them, it could never be taken from them and they would have never been afflicted by any evil). That is always why the Qur'an qualifies this with the phrase *after distress has befallen him*.

…he will surely say, "This is my due…!": In other words, this is something that belongs rightfully to me that I can do with as I please and dispose of however I wish. No one has the right to deny me any of it or hold me to account for what I do with it. It is for this reason that God has the person say: "*I do not think the Hour will ever set in*," as the Hour is, of course, the time of being held to account.

…and in case I am returned to my Lord, I will indeed have the best with Him": In other words, 'I will have a good reward or a pleasant fate.' Such a belief rests on this person's own inflated sense of entitlement, as if to say: Whatever good I possess, even if it is from God, is something I deserve. Therefore, even if the Hour were to come and I was to return to my Lord, 'I would have a pleasant outcome awaiting me with Him!'

Therefore, the meaning of the verse as a whole is: I swear that if We allowed the human being to taste a mercy that is from us, which was neither theirs nor something they deserved, after they had experienced hardship, this should show them that they do not, in fact, possess anything for themselves. Instead, however, they forget whatever came before and say: "This is mine!" This indicates that they do not consider this blessing a mercy from God. What is more, they would say, "no one has the right to prevent me from doing whatever I want with this or hold me to

account for it, and I do not believe that the Hour—which is the Day of Accounting—will ever set in. And I swear, even if I did return to my Lord and the Hour set in, I would have a pleasant outcome with Him because that is what I am entitled to, just as I am entitled to the worldly blessings which He has bestowed upon me.

This verse is very similar in its meaning and style to the parable of the person who owned a garden (which we have already discussed previously): *and I do not think that the Hour will ever set in. And even if I am returned to my Lord I will surely find a resort better than this* (18:36).

But We will surely inform the faithless about what they have done, and will surely make them taste a harsh punishment: This is a threat of punishment.

وَإِذَا أَنْعَمْنَا عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ أَعْرَضَ وَنَأَىٰ بِجَانِبِهِ وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ فَذُو دُعَاءٍ عَرِيضٍ ﴿٥١﴾

(41:51) ***When We bless man, he is disregardful and turns aside; but when an ill befalls him, he makes protracted supplications.***

The phrase 'turns aside' (*naʾā bi jānibih*) means that he withdraws into himself, which is an allusion to his pride and conceitedness. *Protracted* literally means 'wide,' while 'protracted supplications' (*duʿāʾʿarīḍ*) refers to a supplicant's lengthy and incessant prayers to God. Therefore, this verse reprimands the human being and blames them for turning away from God and becoming arrogant when He blesses them, and for only remembering God and praying to Him regularly when they are faced with some calamity.

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ كَفَرْتُمْ بِهِ مَنْ أَضَلُّ مِمَّنْ هُوَ فِي شِقَاقٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٥٢﴾

(41:52) ***Say, 'Tell me, if it is from Allah and you disbelieve in it, who will be more astray than someone who is in extreme defiance."***

Extreme defiance refers to a disagreement where there is no hope of reconciliation or compromise; *someone who is in extreme defiance* is a reference to the idolaters. Notice that the Qur'an does not say: 'those of you who are in extreme defiance,' but instead uses the oblique 'someone who.' This serves to highlight the character trait that is the cause of being astray, namely being in extreme defiance of the truth, rather than restricting this

to a particular group of people.

Hence, the meaning of the verse reads: Say to the idolaters, Tell me, if this Qur'an was from God, then you disbelieved in it, who would be more astray than you? In other words, there are none more astray than you, because you are utterly irreconcilable to the ultimate truth.

In short, this verse is saying that the Qur'an calls you toward God and proclaims that it is from God. What is more, there is at least the possibility of this claim being true, hence you should give it due consideration based on the rational principle of avoiding harm. And what harm could be greater than eternal ruin? So, it is senseless for you to turn away from it in its entirety.

سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْآفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ ۗ أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٥٣﴾

(41:53) ***Soon We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in their own souls until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. Is it not sufficient that your Lord is witness to all things?***

'Horizons' (*āfāq*) is the plural of *ufuq*, meaning 'direction,' while 'witness' (*shahīd*) here means either one who observes or one who is present, and the latter is more apposite for the context of the verse.

Based on the context of this verse, the 'it' in 'it is the truth' (*annahu al-ḥaqq*) refers to the Qur'an. This reading is supported by the previous verse, which mentions the idolaters' disbelief in the Qur'an. Hence, the verse promises to display God's signs on the horizons and in the souls until it becomes clear thereby that the Qur'an is true. The signs that befit the task of demonstrating the truthfulness of the Qur'an are the events and prophecies it has said will come to pass; for example, that God will aid His prophet and the faithful, establish them in the land, and make His religion triumph over all others, and that he will take revenge on the idolaters of the Quraysh, and so on.

God commanded His prophet to emigrate to Medina when the situation in Mecca had become too difficult for him and his followers to bear, for they could find no shelter or protection from persecution. Then, at Badr, he slew the foremost of the Quraysh and, thereafter, his reputation continued to grow and he continued to win victories until he conquered Mecca and the whole of the Arabian Peninsula submitted to him. Then, after his death, Muslim armies conquered most of the civilised world.

In this way, God showed the idolaters His signs on the horizons, which were all the different directions in which the Muslim armies conquered and across which their religion spread. God also showed the idolaters His signs in themselves at Badr, when their kinsmen were cut down in battle.

Of course, these events are not signs in of themselves: After all, how many a victory or conquest has been witnessed in history, and how many champions' deaths have been recounted in stories! However, these events are signs by virtue of the fact that God promised that they would come to pass, the Qur'an prophesied them in advance, and, then, they came to pass as was predicted.

It is also possible that by displaying His signs to them to show them that it' is real, God means—as can be understood from other verses—that God will make His religion manifest and triumphant over all other faiths. After this, none but God will be worshipped upon the face of the earth and the human species will attain felicity in their worldly lives, which is the purpose for which they were created. This is akin in meaning to the verse: *Allah has promised those of you who have faith and do righteous deeds that He will surely make them successors in the earth* (24:55). There are other verses besides this also, and this interpretation is also supported by rational proofs.

What is the difference between the two meanings we have offered? Well, in the first case, the verse is addressed specifically to the idolaters of Mecca and their supporters. On the other hand, the second meaning is addressed to the idolaters of the world in general and it refers to the state of human society. Of course, it is possible that both of these meanings could hold true together.

Another possible reading of the verse is that it refers to the things that the human being sees in the very last moments of his life in this world, when all of his illusions are stripped away, when all of those whom he invoked besides God forsake him, and when all of the means at his disposal are used up, such that only God Almighty remains. Such a reading is supported by the coda of the following verse. In this case, the pronoun 'it' in *it is real* should actually be read as *He* meaning God, which renders the meaning of the phrase: *that He is the Real.*

Scholars have proposed yet other readings of this verse that we have opted to omit here.

Is it not sufficient that your Lord is witness to all things? This is a rhetorical question that is intended as a rebuke. It means: Is it not sufficient to demonstrate the truth of the matter that your Lord is seen with

all things, for there is no thing in existence save that it stands in need of Him from every aspect of its being, while God Almighty is the one who gives it subsistence and rules over it. He is known to all things, even if some things are not aware of Him.

What is the relevance of this question to the beginning of the verse? If we take the third of the three aforementioned readings of the verse, its relevance is clear. If we take the first two, then perhaps the relevance of this question is that the idolaters only disbelieved in the Qur'an because it called them to monotheism. Hence, this question moves from arguing for the truth of the Qur'an by pointing to the truthfulness of its contents to arguing for the truthfulness of its contents directly. It is as though it meant to say: 'We will show them Our signs so that it becomes clear to them that what the Qur'an informs of them of is true, namely that the Lord your God is One and without partner.' Then someone asked: 'This is a long argument, do you have a shorter way?' To which the Qur'an replies: 'Does it not suffice you that your Lord is seen with all things'?

أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ فِي مِرْيَةٍ مِنْ لِقَاءِ رَبِّهِمْ ۗ أَلَا إِنَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ مُحِيطٌ ﴿٥٤﴾

(41:54) ***Look! They are indeed in doubt about the encounter with their Lord! Look! He indeed comprehends all things!***

The context of this verse suggests it wishes to call attention to the fact that the Qur'an's audience does not seem to benefit from its arguments for God's oneness by virtue of His being a witness to all things, even though this is one of the strongest arguments for His oneness and one of the clearest to anyone with sense. But this is because they are in grave doubts about meeting their Lord, which means they are in doubt about His not being veiled from His creatures by His attributes and actions.

Then, He admonishes them with the saying *Look! He indeed comprehends all things!* to show that He knows what will completely eradicate this doubt from their hearts, namely His encompassing of all things in the manner that befits His divinity and greatness, such that no place is empty of Him while He is not restricted to any place, and that nothing is without Him even though He is not contained within anything.

Commentators have offered various interpretations of this verse that might surprise a reader were they to refer to them.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn ʿAsākir narrates from ʿIkrima,

concerning the verse, *Is someone who is cast in the Fire better off, or someone who arrives safely on the Day of Resurrection?*' (41:40): 'It was revealed about ʿAmmār b. Yāsir and about Abū Jahl.'

Author's comments: al-Suyūṭī narrates it from a number of other sources from Bishr b. Tamīm, and also from Ibn ʿAbbās via Ibn Mardawayh: "*Is someone who is cast in the Fire better off…*"—about Abū Jahl—"*or someone who arrives safely on the Day of Resurrection?*"—about Abū Bakr. And this narration represents the application of a general verse to a specific case.

(2) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is narrated from Abī al-Jārūd from Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir], about His saying, *Indeed those who defy the Reminder when it comes to them…* (41:41): 'It means the Qur'an.' *Falsehood cannot approach it, from before it*: 'Falsehood cannot come to it from the Torah, nor from the Evangel, nor from the Psalms.' *Nor from behind it*: 'Nor will there be a book that comes after it to falsify it.'

(3) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, concerning the same verse, several opinions are listed. The third of these is that there is no falsehood in what it reports about what has passed, nor is there any falsehood in what it foretells will happen in the future. All of its claims correspond to the reality of things. This is narrated from Abū Jaʿfar [Imām al-Bāqir] and Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq].

(4) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse: *non-Arabian and Arabian* (41:44): "Were this Qur'an in other than Arabic, they would have said: 'How can we learn it while we speak Arabic and you have brought us a foreign Qur'an!' So God wished to send it down to them in their own language, for God has said: *We did not send any messenger except with the language of his people* (14:4)."

(5) In the *Rawḍa* of *al-Kāfī*, it is narrated from al-Ṭayyār, from Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] about the saying of God: *Soon We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in their own souls until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth* (41:53). He said: 'A sinking into the ground, a transformation, and a barrage of stones.' I asked about *…until it becomes clear to them…*', and he said: 'Leave that for now, that pertains to the rising of the Qāʾim.'

(6) In the *Irshād* of al-Mufīd, it is narrated from ʿAlī b. Abī Ḥamza, from Abī al-Ḥasan Mūsa [Imām al-Kāẓim] about the same verse: 'Tribulations on the horizons of the earth and the transformation of the enemies of the truth.'

(7) In the *Rawḍa* of *al-Kāfī*, with a chain of narrators going back to Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq], concerning this verse: 'He will show them transformation in themselves, and in the horizons He will show them the collapse of the horizons upon them, so they will see God's power displayed in themselves and on the horizons.' I asked about, …*until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth*' (41:53), and he said: 'The rising of the Qāʾim is the truth with God, and the creation will see him.'

The end. All praise be to Almighty God.

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